

## Homily for Sunday, October 4, 2020

My brothers and sisters, Even though we are given all this vineyard imagery in our First Reading, the Psalm, and our Gospel, I am going to speak on our Second Reading today.

This year we read from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians for four Sundays in a row. This is the third week we hear from this Letter. All four readings are very powerful. In fact, if you have not read the Letter to the Philippians in a while, this would be a good time to read it. It is only four Chapters long, five pages in my bible.

Philippi at the time was a major Roman city proud of its history. The New American Bible says this about Philippi in its introductory notes to the Letter: “Originally founded in the sixth century B.C....the town was taken over after Three Hundred-Sixty B.C. by Philip The Second of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, and was renamed for himself, “Philip’s City.” The area became Roman in the second century B.C. On the plains near Philippi in October Forty-Two B.C., Antony and Octavian decisively defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, the slayers of Julius Caesar. Octavian (Augustus) later made Philippi a Roman colony and settled many veterans of the Roman armies there.”

Paul proclaimed the gospel and founded a church in Philippi around the year Fifty A.D. Some of Paul’s activities in Philippi are recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter Sixteen.

The letter addresses some difficulties going on in Philippi, but, as one scripture scholar said, stands out as a letter that reflects, “...the warm affection of the apostle for his brothers and sister in Christ. Indeed, Philippians has been classified an example of the rhetoric of friendship.”

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In the last half of the passage today, verses eight and nine, Paul says:

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you. If there is anything good – think on these things.”

Think about these things. What does that mean?

It does not mean what, in the United States, we used to call, “Seeing the world through rose-colored glasses.” Refusing to see sinfulness and messiness. It also does not mean suppressing all our negative feelings – never dealing with them by immediately thinking only “happy thoughts.” That all too often leads to someone eventually releasing a mountain of rage at someone for the smallest mistake. And when this happens, that Christian doesn’t know where it came from.

Think about these things. What does that mean?

It DOES mean countering bad habits with good. Not just stopping bad language but practicing speaking well, and speaking well of others.

Think about these things. What does that mean?

It DOES mean stop encouraging anger. To only think about what I am angry about makes me angrier. To ponder alternatives, to step away, to humbly say I am sorry, and to be grateful for what I have – these get me out of a ditch I otherwise dig for myself.

This week, while anointing a sick man, he asked if we could pray for the president. So I said a prayer for the man leading our country, and for all our leaders, and for whoever would lead the country in a few months. I asked if he wanted to add to that, and he prayed for the president’s health. It was at that point that he told me the president was positive with the Coronavirus. He said he disagreed with the president, but wanted him blessed. Note that: he did not go off on a tirade about why he should dislike the president even more than he does. He simply prayed for his health.

There is a Franciscan priest who gives the following example whenever he gives retreats. One of the Franciscans he used to live with always got on his nerves. He decided to write down, in a notebook he carried in his pocket, every time he would notice even the smallest nice thing that this Franciscan would do. Eventually they became good friends. And the other guy did not change at all. This priest’s attitude changed toward him as he noticed the good things, and not the bad, of the other.

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Think about these things. Sometimes we even have to research what the virtue of patience is, to help us become patient. Often, what is most gracious and lovely and worthy of praise is exactly what the world doesn't see as good.

“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Think about the Cross. Jesus is God, He is fully human. He is Love incarnate. If I want to be fully human, if I want to truly love, I need to look to the cross; so that I may follow Him.

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And then, what does Paul write? That everything will go our way? We will always get what we want? No, he says something else, which is a comfort to us in good times and in bad.

Paul says: “Then the God of peace will be with you.”

We want God with us. We want peace. When we do as he says, we get His peace, and Him as our companion.

“If there is anything good – think on these things.”