

Homily for Sunday, February 20, 2022

Last week, this week, and next week, our gospel reading is from the sixth chapter of Saint Luke. These passages are sometimes called “The Sermon on the Plain.” Our Lord’s instruction here is the equivalent of Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount.”

One of the methods schools are encouraged to do to describe their values and goals is to write up something called a “Portrait of a Graduate.” It is a description of what a student will be equipped with and ready for in knowledge and personality as they move forward from their time in the school.

This Sermon on the Plain is one of the places in the New Testament where we are given a Portrait of a “Christian,” a “Portrait of a Member of the Kingdom.” It is both challenging and inspiring.

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A Christian’s portrait should look a lot like - Christ. It is only when we look at Jesus that we can understand the logic of the Sermon. God the Son made Himself vulnerable to us in order to save us. Jesus is the template, Jesus is the model for what we want to be like. And we can be like Him only by following Him and letting Him guide us and fill us up and transform us. We are to be images - we are to be sacraments - of Him. Through us others should be able to catch a glimpse of Christ, and be drawn to communion with Him.

In that sense, it is providential that our Second Reading today speaks of bearing His image.

Paul introduces the Corinthians to that ancient understanding that in Christ everything changed. Paul speaks of the First model and ancestor for human beings and the Last model and new beginning for human beings. He speaks of the First Adam and the Last Adam.

The First Adam was made in the image and likeness of God. In bringing sin into the world, that image was blurred and made small. But still – it is still an amazing image. Humanity is alive and can understand and explore the world and create art and laugh and love. We certainly bear the image of that First Adam.

The Last Adam is a new model for us. Christ is as far above Adam as Adam is above the nothing from which God created the world. Jesus is born as a Son of Adam, born into a world influenced by sin throughout the ages. Yet He is a life-giving Spirit. He is the visible image of the invisible Father. This New Adam - the Christ - is the Firstborn of the dead. He gives His Holy Spirit to all, that all may be one in Him. That we may all bear the image of this First Last Adam. That we can be like Christ, we can be Christians. The world in Him has been recreated – made new. Life has been restored. The Image made bright and strong.

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Lent begins in about ten days. It starts with Ash Wednesday, when we remember our dusty image as sons and daughters of the First Adam. And we spend this time of about forty days in a metaphorical desert. Doing with less of something, that we me have more time and energy and attention for Jesus, whose image we wish to look more and more like.

That image is one that includes loving of those in need, and loving those who hurt us; for we are related to them as both children of the First Adam and the Last Adam.

The Measure with which we measure will in return be measured out to us.

May our choices for Lent help us to let go of little things, that we may grab hold more strongly the greater things – the things that last.