

HOMILY FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 2020

As you know, we were not together for Palm Sunday. We DID have the palms, and have been storing them. They were available last weekend, and are available today after Mass. We have plenty of them, so please take as many as you would like. And then some more. Thank you.

My brothers and sisters, we still have to be careful for some time in our gatherings. Life will continue to be strange for a while. People are talking about “the new normal” because there is no getting back to normal. But we all know that is how our lives are in the world, and our lives are in Christ. We are always in flux. Jobs and schools change, people move, people are born and die. And we bring our faith and the wisdom God gives us into new situations.

The quarantine meant some of us had to delay receiving the Easter Sacraments. We can now receive them. But rather than in large groups, we are doing them in small numbers. For instance, this week someone is receiving Confirmation at one of our Masses. And instead of one Mass overflowing with children for First Communion, a few of the young will make their First Communion at the weekend Masses for the next several weeks. This is good. We can weekly remind ourselves of the awesome newness Christ gives us at every Mass and regularly rejoice as one of our family receives Christ’s Body for the First time.

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As you know, Ordinary Time gets interrupted From Ash Wednesday through Corpus Christi, which we celebrate last Sunday. In the process, there are a few Sunday Readings we miss. Because of that, I don’t believe I have preached these readings before at Saint Lawrence.

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Today’s First Reading from the Prophet Jeremiah reminds me of my experience praying the Psalms.

The Psalms are hymns that go back to the time of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of them have titles saying they were written by King David. For a thousand years they were hymns for worship. And then for these next two thousand year, from the beginning, we Christians have prayed them as well. In the Liturgy of the Hours, which we are all encouraged to pray and which as a priest I am required to pray, the core of this prayer is to pray the Psalms.

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It is not always easy to pray the psalms. An example is that there are many psalms that ask God to defend us from and avenge us on our enemies. How are we supposed to pray these prayers regularly? We may not have enemies. Or we may just be angry with a few people (or, at times, many people) – anger that Jesus wants us to let go of. Or we have people who are oppressing us, but these psalms just remind us of our suffering. What have the faithful done with these prayers over the centuries?

One of the things the Church has reminded us is that there is a great Spiritual message to these psalms. We are part of a cosmic spiritual battle. Ultimately, other people are not our enemies. The ultimate enemy is Satan. The Devil hates all of us. Each of us – is made in the image and likeness of God – even the people we may not like. And Satan hates that.

So the Spiritual focus of the Psalms when they speak of enemies is: the temptation I experience. The enemy is my sinfulness. I need God, I need Jesus, to conquer my sin and forgive me, to save me from temptation, and to purify my heart.

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In Jeremiah today we hear about the very real human enemies he has. They really do seek his life. We can relate to Him when we think of those who are not nice to us. And we can relate to him even more when we think of the impersonal systems and the attitude of the culture that oppresses us – although we cannot put a face with this enemy and we cannot point a finger at any one person as the cause. And we can relate to Jeremiah most of all when we realize that the Ruler of this world is always battling God, and setting people against each other.

So Jeremiah tells himself, and us, that “The LORD is with me, like a mighty champion.” “Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked.”

And in our Psalm for today we hear the same cry that can be a cry to free us from temptation: “In Your great kindness answer me with your constant help.”

And finally, in our gospel the Lord reminds us of how special we are to Him.

As small as we feel, the sparrow is even smaller. Yet God cares for the Sparrow. We need not “be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” He is with us.

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So we come to Christ in our sickness, in our loneliness, our fear – and in our sinfulness – and ask His help. And He is with us.

This is the joy of Jeremiah. This is the joy of the Psalmist. And this is our joy. The Joy that God brings us.

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In the Communion today – let us give thanks that Christ comes so close to us to be with us. And may we ever come to Him who comes to us in the Mass.