

HOMILY FOR 26th Sunday, Year A – Sept 27, 2020

As human beings we think about how to make sense of pain, struggle, hurt, illness, injury, and death. And we also think about how this fits into God's plan. We wonder how it might relate to living moral lives.

In these few minutes we cannot address all the ways our faith has shed light on this mystery of human suffering. But in today's First Reading we are invited to look at death and life, sin and virtue in light of God who is all loving and all good.

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We know some of our behavior affects our lifespan. It is easy to make the connections when talking about exercise and eating right, or when talking about alcoholism and gambling addiction. It gets more complicated when we talk about someone who, influenced by drugs, hurts another person.

The Jewish and Christian scriptures record many of our Community's different theologies on how we relate to God. Part of our reflections is the realization that God made each of us humans as part of a whole. Adam's sin affected the rest of us. The King's virtue or sinfulness affected the rest of the Kingdom of Israel. We are family.

This is a truth through which we understand Christ's great act of love for us. Because God the Son was able to fully become a human, and because all humans are connected, His saving death affects all humans. Because He is fully God, that saving act was infinite. His act of love was for everyone who lived then, everyone who had lived in the past, and everyone who would ever live in the future.

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In our First Reading today, Ezekiel prophesies another aspect of this mystery. Though people are connected, humans are still individuals. God has a personal relationship with each of us. We will receive reward from God according to our relationship with God and our actions and inactions; God who will render to each person according to his deeds. [Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:6]

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But note the message, which is also emphasized in the New Testament. The ultimate judgement is not about God weighing all the person's good deeds and all

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the person's bad deeds, and seeing which is heavier. The judgement is one of direction, which way the person is turned.

Ezekiel speaks of the one who turns from virtue to iniquity, and the one who turns from wickedness to virtue.

Our Lord gives this image in his parable of the father and two sons today. The lesson is not about whether the son initially honored the father or not, but whether the son honored the Father's commands in the end.

And we know from experience that the decision to turn toward Christ or away, to move closer to Our Lord or farther away, is made many times a day. We want to be in the habit of remaining with Him, of drawing closer, of turning back, and of obeying His wise rule. We want to be facing Him when our personal "end" has come.

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To sum up, the mystery of our humanity is that we are linked, and yet we are also individually responsible.

On the one hand, we affect each other, we influence each other. Fathers and mothers are very aware of this. They know their responsibility is to bring their children into a love relationship with Christ. And they answer to God for this responsibility.

On the other hand, it is not about our parents. We are all, according to our ability, called personally by God. And each of us is responsible for answering that call. Each of us is to come to God, to turn back to God.

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Every now and then I hear someone use the phrase, "God has no grandchildren." This simply means that in Christ, we are all sharers in His Son-ship. By our personal relationship with Jesus, we are sons and daughters of God the Father. We are not members of God's family because someone in our family goes to Church. We need to claim our inheritance and take our place in the family business, the family home.

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There is a quote from Father Karl Rahner which many people still quote decades later. It is, “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all.” By the word “mystic” he did not mean someone who has visions. A mystic in the broader meaning is one who sees Christ everywhere, who recognizes the hand of God in everyday life. A mystic lives his (or her) life as an ongoing encounter with Christ. And we can all do that.

I recently heard another theologian say something similar. This man had been a Christian most of his life, but found his relationship with Christ fulfilled when he became Catholic. He said it this way: “In order to be a Catholic in the twenty-twenties [2020’s], you have to be a convert.” In other words, you have to let God convert you. Conversion is a daily saying yes to God and turning back to Christ; each person individually.

“God has no grandchildren.”

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