

Lenten Homily
Tues March 31, 2010

Good morning. Looking out at the eight of you, I am touched by and reminded of the power of "the few", for after all is that not what "this" is all about? Welcome.

This is a time of year, the lenten season and holy week that I've always found full of contradictions...both sobering and somber and yet filled with anticipation, a time when I am continually reminded of what to me are elemental and powerful aspects of Christ's challenges and journeys, and thus ours, if we are to truly to assert that we have embarked on the mission of Christian faith.

I'd like to take a moment to reflect this morning on two critical H's that I find central to my embrace of and admittedly imperfect and still developing understanding of Christ...Humility and Humanity.

Much of what strikes me as rather sad is that one of the very qualities that makes the story of Christ's last days so dramatic, so honest, so emotionally telling and wrenching is a quality that seems somehow lost, forgotten...or possibly intentionally abandoned in today's world.

I speak specifically of the notion of humility, not the "aw shucks" 'twas nothing "false humility" sort, but the true ability to put all else before one's own needs, to willingly and knowingly submit to the ultimate authority of the Almighty, to recognize and acknowledge others virtues and talents, and to truly know and accept the limits and ends of ones own. It fascinates and troubles me that a quality so admired and celebrated at least in the spiritual sense and a cornerstone of Christianity and western religion and culture has today become somehow synonymous with weakness, caving in, non-assertiveness, even cowardice. How is it that we have so fully corrupted a quality that Christ lived fully and exemplified to his human end and beyond? I would purport that humility is in short supply on all fronts. One has but to look at the bluster, anger, posturing and pontificating on the political front, the notion of machismo, strength and heroism that we subscribe to in our media; whether books, TV, cinema, the utter need for and importance attached to credentialing, labeling, hierarchy, accomplishments, and cachet names in our professional and educational realms.

I do know this. Any and all of us who have truly experienced the personal touch of the Holy Spirit, who have literally felt (and for me that has had real physical manifestations) god at work in our lives, who feel and live the joy and comfort of abiding faith, who work to trust absolutely and to subject ourselves to the will and power of a being more wise, strong and knowing than anything we can imagine... we have almost certainly found it at the bottom of our own individual and collective wells or pits. We so often cannot claim humility...too often it finds and makes us, in spite of our best efforts. So often, like it or not, humbleness is thrust upon us by circumstances. We are broken by our own will and poor judgments or actions...and here is where we find God and he us. As often as not it is only in the midst of the mot abject fear, despair and hopelessness that we can release all the other trappings and allow God to enter our lives fully.

Even having experienced many of these epiphanies in my 55 years...moments when I can feel God touching me and providing his answer(s) NOT mine,

moments when an abiding sense of comfort and calm have flowed into me even as I felt fully overwhelmed...I have not learned to and may never perfect the ability to allow Christ into my life and soul on a less dramatic and infrequent basis. I know that that is too often my own humanity and self will getting in the way. And all I can do is keep trying and asking for the grace to be taught and opened to God's presence and power in my little life.

Secondly...that very humanity I just spoke of...that accursed blessing...that state of very imperfect grace we exist in. We see it and feel it in Christ's uncertainty and fears in John...a foreshadowing of the deeper terrors and doubt to come in Gethsemane. We see us in Him. What an awe-inspiring notion...to know that Christ walked and lived as us and in the moments of deepest sacrifice felt the same base emotions that we would expect to. I remember well when that powerful idea first felt real to me. Oddly enough I was an early 20-something in the mid seventies and had just purchased the rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar, one of Andrew Lloyd Weber's and Tim Rice's earliest collaborations. While many might have then and may still today find it irreverent and blasphemous...for whatever reason it spoke to me in a deep, resounding and powerful way; in that it made Christ's struggles real and accessible to me in a way that at that time in my life no teacher, church or preacher nor my parents had been able to. The power of music and lyrics, of a topical treatment of the "greatest story ever told" did indeed somehow worm their way into my soul and actually opened the cracks and exposed the voids that over the ensuing decades and life experiences became ripe ground for Gods hand and work. But again, it was coming at Christ through his humanity rather than his divinity, inextricably though they may be bound, that began me on my own Christian journey. With that I leave you with the notion and imperative that we must all continue to seek and create those openings in our lives that allow Christ's entrance and action.

Amen

Perry Swope