

A Breath of Life from the Wilderness - 108 - 21st Sunday A in Ordinary Time

Good day dear brothers and sisters! Are you and your family well? I hope that you are indeed all well in the Lord. These continue to be very strange times, and they are challenging times for everyone. Once again today our God assures us that He is very close to us and that He carries in his heart all of our needs and preoccupations. In fact, with his Son Jesus in the Holy Spirit our God and Father cares for us and our families even more than we care for ourselves.

So, what do you carry with you today as you have come into the Sunday Assembly of the living God? As you were preparing to come to church today, what preoccupations were you carrying in your mind and heart? This past week, or during the whole time since you were last here, where were you applying your efforts and energies? What are your responsibilities? What are your burdens? What things of yours are you bringing to the Lord today as your offering to put on his altar so you can make a whole hearted offering of yourself with Jesus to the Father?

Last Sunday the Lord declared that He intends for all people to be welcome in his house because He wants to show his mercy to every human being. The Lord knows that we are locked in battle with our own human weakness and with the troubles of this world, and He sympathizes with us, caring profoundly for us. God intends for every human being to experience his mercy, his great love which we could never deserve. Jesus even teased the foreign woman who begged Him to heal her daughter by using the derogatory term of “dogs” with her, but not in the way that Jews at that time did. People had contempt for foreigners, but Jesus showed her kindness and tenderness with the tone of his voice and the warmth of his eyes. He encouraged her to say what she wanted and she did; and then He granted her heart’s desire.

This is very good news, that God is kind and merciful to everyone, and that He wants all people to come to Him with trust in his divine mercy. But there’s a problem. Too many people don’t know that God is kind and merciful; so they keep their distance. People stay away from God and from his Sunday Assembly. Many people don’t pray because they are either afraid of God or they are angry with Him because their troubles in life are not being resolved. God says words of kindness to people but they have closed their ears, closed their minds, and closed their hearts. That is why our God needs messengers to declare the good news that He offers kindness and mercy to everyone. Now, who will be messengers of good news for our God?

We Catholics are known to be “allergic” to talking about God to others. We might feel close to God ourselves, but we feel too shy or reserved to talk about God to others, even to our own family members. The problem with this is that no one can get to heaven on our own, all by ourselves. This is because we are all in this life together, we are all connected to one another; we are all part of the living body into which we were initiated at Baptism. We cannot be indifferent to anyone else. All together we are the body of Christ continuing to live in this world, and Jesus is our Head. Jesus needs us to be his body living, speaking, and loving in this world. He has already done his part, his mission as a human being, and now, as the Son of God He continues his mission in us and through us.

So, Jesus is putting his questions to us today. “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Think about it. Who is Jesus for your family members, for those who don’t often come to the Sunday Assembly? Who is Jesus for your neighbours and friends, for your co-workers or fellow students?

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Then, once Jesus has asked us about all the other people in our lives; then He becomes very personal and asks us the really tough question: “But who do you say that I am?” In English we don’t get it, but in their language of Aramaic, as in the more formal language of Hebrew, it was forbidden to say the expression “I am” – no one was allowed to say “I am” anything, I am tired, I am hungry, no, never “I am”, because these are the words God used when the voice of God spoke to Moses from the burning bush on the holy mountain. Moses asked what name he should use to tell the people when they would ask him who it was that spoke to him. God’s answer to the question “Who are you?” was simply: “I am. I am who I am.”

As a human being, Jesus needed those close to Him to know, to understand, and to believe who He really is, the Son of the living God. Otherwise, there’s no way that the apostles would have been willing to become Jesus’ messengers in the world, whether people wanted to listen to them or not. The same is true for us. People may or may not want to listen to us when we speak to them about God, about his kindness and mercy, about his desire to become more involved in their lives. There’s no way we will be willing to endure people’s reactions when we speak to them about God; not unless we become convinced ourselves of who Jesus really is.

God has to become more real to us than simply a mysterious being who grants wishes. God is not a “genie” in a bottle who grants 3 wishes. The living God is a Holy Trinity of divine persons in an eternal community of love which gives life: the Eternal Father, the only-begotten Son who became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, Jesus the risen Lord and the Christ, and the Holy Spirit – together from all eternity they have been the most Holy Trinity. When we see Jesus we see the Father, because as a human being, Jesus is the perfect image of who the Father really is. The Father and the Son continually pour the living water of the Holy Spirit into us, giving us inspiration, strength, vitality, peace, love, and joy even in the midst of trials and suffering.

So, Jesus’ question will not go away. “But who do you say that I am?” We won’t come up with an answer from our own minds and hearts. None of the apostles answered Jesus except Peter, and Jesus declared plainly that it was not any human power that revealed the truth about Jesus to Peter, but it was Jesus’ Father in heaven. There is no other way for us either. Only the Father can reveal Jesus to us. We will not discern the quiet voice of the Father speaking to our spirit deep within us as long as we remain afraid of silence, of interior silence.

For the past four thousand years the only people who came to know God were those who were willing to slow down, stop, and be still in order to allow themselves to enter into their own spirit inside of themselves and, there, to enter into silence. When we try to do that, when we try to pray and meditate on the words of God and the things of God, we at first encounter interior noise, lots of noise: the noise of our many thoughts and feelings, our list of things to do, of fears and preoccupations, of our suffering and disappointments, of our concerns for others, of our many duties, an on and on and on, a lot of noise, which can be intimidating....

We don’t need to be afraid, because the Holy Spirit is always with us, within us, to guide us along the way of silence, the way of meditation and contemplation, the way of prayer and listening to the Word of God. From the cross as He was dying, Jesus entrusted us along with his beloved apostle John to the care of Mary as our Mother. In the Rosary she guides us to Jesus. Mary is an expert in pondering the things of God in her heart and she is eager to help us do that. **Shall we pray? PRAY**