

Good Friday Homily

Friday, April 3, 2015

READINGS:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 31

Hebrews 4:14-16;5:7-9

The Passion according to John

As we continue our liturgy, we begin from where we were last night at the Last Supper when Jesus reminded us that we must love as He does. These were not just words they were actions. Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of his disciples. "For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you." Today is different. Today there is a kind of numbness which sets in. It is the numbness we experience in the presence of a loved one who has just died. We can only imagine the thoughts and feelings of Jesus' disciples looking at Golgotha and Jesus on the cross from a safe distance. Their hopes and dreams were shattered. Their expectation of Jesus as the Messiah dead. Despair. Fear. Nowhere to go. They had not yet experienced the resurrection because resurrection had never before occurred in human history. Jesus was dead. Period.

Perhaps we feel this way as we look around us at our world, 2000 years after Jesus' crucifixion. Yesterday hundreds of young adults at a Christian university in Kenya, murdered for being Christian. Millions of

Christians displaced from their homes because of persecution. 21

Egyptian Coptic young men beheaded for their faith!

As we gaze upon the cross, we too are confronted with absurdity. Why did Jesus die? Why did we kill him? Just days ago we were crying out, 'Hosanna to the Son of David' and today, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' And yes we are part of that Jewish crowd. Why did Jesus willingly give himself up to a horrible death? Our Second Reading from Hebrews attempts to give a reasonable answer, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." But reason fails us as we gaze on the cross. All our powers of intellect are useless before Jesus on the cross. Reason can take us only so far on life's journey—to complete our journey we need the 'heart'. For the Hebrew mind, the 'heart' is a holistic idea that includes our intellect and our will. The 'heart' is the source of all our actions. The 'heart' is who we are, made from dust, in the image and likeness of God. Jesus always spoke of his mission to change the 'hearts' of all those he encountered. Pascal Blaise the 17th century mathematician and philosopher understood the limits of reason, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not." When we stand today at the foot of the cross, we cannot understand, but we cradle the crucified one in our hearts. Mary understood this. At the very beginning, the prophet Simeon had warned her. "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own heart." Later when as a boy in the temple where Mary found him, she did not understand

what he meant when he said 'I must be about my Father's business,'; we are told, "His mother treasured all these things in her heart." (Luke 2:51). As we look upon the cross, and in a few moments as we begin the adoration of the cross, let us 'look' with the heart not our busy inquisitive, demanding minds. The heart does not demand immediate answers to questions which trouble us—why evil? Why crucifixion?—the heart keeps everything in perspective; the heart ponders, holds opposites together. Mary pondered, waited in faith, hoping and sensing the coming of something even greater than Jesus' suffering and death—the great Paschal mystery of all time: the Resurrection. Jesus' passion, death and ultimate victory in rising from the dead is the *axis mundi*, around which all of human history revolves. The Resurrection is the triumph of the 'heart' over reason and in our secular world dominated by the worship of science and technology, this is the message we must give. We will never fully understand the resurrection without experiencing it with the heart.

It is the 'heart' united with Jesus' heart which enables us to continue to love others, to care for the oppressed, to care for the sick and elderly, to work for justice, to care about the earth in all its beauty. Despite what reason tells us as we look out at our broken world that all is lost and hopeless, the 'heart' knows transformation is possible even when the mind cannot see it.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine says, "Thou has made us for thyself and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."

In his homily on the Feast of St. Augustine two years ago, Pope Francis spoke of Augustine's search for meaning even when he was lost in a life of debauchery and hedonism:

"But in his heart, there remained the restlessness of the search for the profound meaning of life. His heart was not asleep, it was not anesthetized by success, by things, by power....We must look into our hearts and ask if we have a heart that wants great things or a heart that is asleep. Has our heart maintained that restlessness or has it been suffocated by things? The restlessness of love always pushes us forward to go out and encounter the other without waiting for the other to tell us what he needs."

Let us quiet our minds with its unanswerable questions before the cross, and in our hearts ponder the words of adoration, "Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the salvation of the world. Come let us adore."