

Homily For Tuesday of the 14th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - July 6, 2021

Genesis 32:22-32 "Jacob was left alone and a man wrestled with him until daybreak."

Psalms 17:1-8 "If you test me, you will find no wickedness in me."

Matthew 9:32-38 "Jesus went about proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom."

It's Ok To Wrestle With God

Introduction

Today, we see Jacob on his way to attempt reconciliation with his brother. Tomorrow, the brothers of Joseph discover that they are paying a price for what they did to their brother. Today, Jesus sees the people as harassed and anxious, like sheep without a shepherd. Tomorrow, Jesus will declare himself sent to the lost sheep of Israel, as the Good Shepherd. These things are not distant from us. They are a matter of faith that God's great plan of salvation continues to unfold in our lives today. We remain in need of reconciliation and of demonstrating the love of the Good Shepherd, Christ himself.

Genesis

Jacob is on his way back home after a long exile from his immediate family, especially his brother, Esau, whom he cheated out of his birthright and his father Isaac's blessing. He doesn't know if his brother will welcome him or kill him, but he has to find out. There are some things to note in this remarkable passage.

Jacob is alone, having sent his family and possessions ahead of him. Only in solitude can there be a true encounter with God. Jacob has, intentionally or not, set himself apart to make himself available, like Jesus going off by himself to pray. For us this is still true and we need to ask ourselves whether we are making enough time and space for God to enter in.

Into this solitude comes a man who wrestles with him. With my four brothers, there was always a question of who started the fight. Here, we don't know who started it, but it becomes obvious later that the man is somehow God himself in

some form. Jacob was alone so he could wrestle spiritually with God over what he had done to his brother.

Reminiscent of when he asked his father for a blessing that wasn't his, now he is willing to struggle for it honestly, perhaps for the first time as himself before God. He is like the psalmist after him, who prays: If you test me, you will find no wickedness in me. This wrestling is for his own purity of heart.

But the blessing won't be just for him. The angel changes Jacob's name to Israel, which means "one who wrestles with God." On the one hand, this image will define how God's people, Jews and Christians throughout history, will rebel against God's justice. This passage lifts up the spiritual struggle as being at the heart of the relationship God has with his people. Children do wrestle with their parents. In a relationship of love, this is healthy.

Jacob's uncle was Ishmael, who became the ancestor of Islam, which means "one who submits to God." Allah is a master, not a father. But God is ok with Jacob wrestling. In Judaism and Christianity, see ourselves as having the dignity of sons and daughters. We are in the 'imago dei', the image of God. You have to be sons and daughters to have that image.

Matthew

The Pharisees who constantly challenge Jesus are not coming from a place of wrestling for the truth about God's image. They wrestle against the truth, Jesus himself. Blind to the truth about God, and about their responsibility as loving shepherds for the people, they come up with the most ridiculous analysis of Jesus' obvious power over the forces of nature and illness and even the demons.

The crowds express great enthusiasm over Christ's kingdom. Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel. The Pharisees do not merely disagree with Jesus' teaching. Later, Jesus will point out the silliness of their argument. Then he will identify for his disciples the need for leaders who are willing to fight for truth instead of submit to lies.

Conclusion

Jacob struggled with God to receive an honest blessing. He was left with a physical infirmity to remind him of that blessing. Jesus fought the demon and conquered it. His willingness to struggle for all of humanity left him with the wounds which we venerate, especially on Good Friday, because they are constant reminders of our reconciliation with God and with our brothers and sisters. In Christianity, we do not submit to God as slaves. We wrestle, then submit as children deeply loved.

Whatever injustice has been done to First Nations children in the residential schools is a great tragedy. Hopefully we will find out so we can know what is true and what is not. However, we do know that there are no names on their graves. For the sake of their families, they must be known, even as they are known by name in the kingdom which Christ proclaimed.

The Church will have to wrestle for its integrity. What did happen to the children? Was it as simple as a disease or was there also some neglect or even abuse that contributed? A route I commonly cycle has the words painted on the deck of a pedestrian bridge: We were children, along with the hand prints meant to symbolize those lives.

St. Maria Goretti fought for her purity against an attacker and she initiated reconciliation with her killer, leading to his conversion to Christ and her canonization as a revered child saint of the Church. May we wrestle for our purity and for the reconciliation Jesus Christ paid on our behalf.

Key Scripture Passages

Collect: *O God, give all Christians the grace to reject whatever is contrary to the name of Christ.*

Genesis: *Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. The man struck him and Jacob's hip was put out of joint. Jacob said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. The man said: You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. Then Jacob asked him: Please tell me your name. But he said: Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. Jacob said: I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved. To this day, the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket.*

Psalms: *O Lord, give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. If you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me ... When I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.*

Matthew: *The Pharisees said: By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons. Then Jesus went about proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. He had compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples: The harvest is plentiful ... therefore ask the Lord to send out labourers into His harvest.*

Maria Goretti: *This marvelous saint combined the innocence of childhood with the fierce defense of her childhood purity. It cost her life. She is perhaps a saint for those at present unnamed children.*