

Homily For the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C

St. Peter's Sat 5:00/Sun 8:00/9:30/11:30 Masses - July 16/17, 2022

Genesis 18:1-10 "My Lord, if I have found favour with you, do not pass by your servant."

Psalms 15 "Whoever walks blamelessly and does what is right ... shall never be moved."

Colossians 1:24-28 "I became the Church's servant to make the Word of God fully known."

Luke 10:38-42 "You are worried and distracted by many things. There is need of only one."

Recognizing the Lord

Introduction

In the original Matrix movie, Neo is a young man who is troubled by a deep sense that his life is superficial, but that there is something much deeper going on inside him and inside the world around him. Eventually he meets the wise Morpheus who seems to know about this mystery. Morpheus says: "You can feel that there is something more. You know something. You can feel it but you can't explain it. You have felt it your entire life. It is a feeling that there is something wrong with the world and it's driving you mad like a splinter." It turns out that this reality which is beyond consciousness is the Matrix, which turns out to be a massive computer program within which the same old battle of good and evil is being played out. It is that battle which is the basis for most stories in most cultures in most of human history. It's the same story with the same elements of Star Wars, where The Force is that environment just outside the usual perceptions but which influences everything. Both Neo and Luke Skywalker are seen as the ones who can bring a kind of stability or harmony to the universe. They are saviour images. It is important for us to understand that these modern stories are popular and influential precisely because they attempt to capture in a fictional way, something that is actually true in the deepest sense.

Our Christian story is the story that I believe all of our fiction stories are trying to copy or draw on in some way or other. We call this story 'Salvation History'. This story isn't a bunch of recorded facts. This story isn't made up to entertain us. This is the story of the designer and creator of everything, who gave us life to carry out

his plan of sheer goodness. That plan is to share his own blessed life with us. It's the story of God's plan to restore us to a close relationship with him, a closeness that was lost at the beginning. All the individual parts of the story reflect how God, very slowly and in a way that humankind could grasp, has shown himself and his plan to us over time. The world, wounded by sin, is indeed the place where something is wrong. But fixing of that wrong does not depend on any human person. Jesus Christ is that Saviour, who is sent by God, but who also is God. Everything in the story of salvation leads to Jesus Christ or from Jesus Christ. Now we come to the passages from the scriptures which tell us something about the reality of that story and which invite us to enter once again into the great mystery of love and mercy and forgiveness.

Genesis

The events of Abraham's visit from the Lord contains details that will help us know that it is a true part of the story. We get the time of day and a weather report - the heat of the day. It has a location, the oaks of Mamre. I don't know where those oaks are but they exist, and Mamre is a real place. Sarah is there, and their tent.

Sometimes God appears in dreams or visions. On that day, three men are walking by Abraham and Sarah's place. Abraham knows instantly there is something special about them. In some way, he is in tune with the mystery of God's presence. He has a certain attentiveness to divinity, to the things of God. Are they angels? Is it God in human form? Why are there three of them? Is that the Blessed Trinity? What is most important for us today is Abraham has the spiritual insight to recognize that the a supernatural presence has entered into the natural world, that what is spiritual has entered the world of the physical.

Already then we might be able to perceive how the story of salvation is pointing forward to the time when God will fully enter into our world, take on our form, experience our joys and sorrows. The Messiah will not simply appear. He will be our natural healer and ally, but also our supernatural redeemer and saviour. He will be our Emmanuel, God with us.

Abraham doesn't know the rest of the story but, with this spiritual insight, he asks nothing of the strangers except to be allowed to serve them. A man of great wealth and status seeks only to honour the presence of the divine. He does not even eat with them, making himself a true servant of God. Maybe it was a test of his faith. Maybe it was simply a gift to Abraham and Sarah to encourage them to continue trusting that God would fulfill his promise to make them the mother and father of a great nation, with a land, and a saviour who will bless the whole world

This event shows us, like a picture or a movie, the invitation to recognize the holy, to be in awe, to bow down and worship, and to find joy in serving our God, and also to serve in some way the rest of those to whom God has given his precious blessed life.

Luke

But how does the story of Martha and Mary fit this idea of the revealing of the great mystery of God? Well, we know that Mary has figured it out. She listens to the Messiah with her whole being. Martha has somehow gotten it a little bit wrong. How do we know that? We have already seen from Abraham that serving God is a good thing. It's a great thing. Martha has gotten it wrong because she let something that is good take away from something that is awesome. She let a lesser good take the place of a greater good.

What's wrong with that? Well, let's look at the result. She becomes self focussed, wanting praise for her service and jealous that her sister is just hanging out with Jesus, whose attention she wants for herself. Don't you care that I am doing all the work? Don't you care that she is doing nothing? Everyone wants to know if Jesus really cares. We always have trouble believing that we are loved. If God doesn't care about me then why would I even want to have faith in that God? Faith is a lot of work. I have to live a moral life according to the commandments. I have to do good things for others. I have to stop doing the sinful things that are so attractive to me.

Remember in the boat when the storm came up and Jesus was sleeping. They woke him up with the question: Don't you care that we are going to drown?

Martha did welcome him and serve him but she missed the most important part, being present with him. To Martha he says: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." Jesus points out her anxiety. She is in the presence of the one who is peace itself but she is not at peace. She is a disciple but for the moment is missing that awe and reverence, and therefore does not truly honour him from her heart.

While Martha was preoccupied with hospitality, Mary gave her full attention to the Lord, sitting at his feet and listened to what he was saying. That's the posture of a disciple before the master. And our Lord says about her, Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. She sat at Jesus' feet, like Abraham who bowed down to the ground before divine presence.

Prayer

Both Abraham and Mary have a relationship with God. If we are serious about entering into the mystery of life and love, and of understanding how sin affects those things, we have to spend time with God. We don't have to be holy to spend time with Jesus. Spending time with Jesus is what makes us holy.

One great saint said that everyone he knew who had lost their faith, started by discontinuing prayer. Understanding how God's plan is being worked out requires prayer. People say sometimes that they prayed but nothing happened. The problem there is that we don't realize the primary purpose of prayer is so that our hearts might be transformed by being in the presence of the God of transformation.

As one person put it, if we don't pray, we get unprayed for results. There was a Canadian priest who told the story of his own life. As he got more and more involved in his priestly duties, very slowly he prayed less and less. Everything he did was service to his congregation and to others. That loss of prayer was just a very little bit at first, but gradually he heard himself making little excuses as he would fall in to bed exhausted after a long day. He would say, God knows that I have done everything for his own people today. He would repeat to himself what he heard someone else say, that all of our work should be like a prayer. But

finally, he realized that, as he put it, "My work had become my prayer." He lost sight of the one thing necessary, and finally burned out, because busy-ness took over.

We are busy with many things such that we don't recognize when God visits. Even if you do, there is no time to be present with him.

Teresa of Calcutta is a saint, not because she served the poorest of the poor, but because she was led to serve by much prayer, up to four hours a day some say, starting very early in the morning. I know praying that much is never going to be my practice. I'm too much activity oriented. However, every one of us can do one thing that Teresa did, which is to make spending time with Jesus the first priority. She did the one thing necessary first. Do you see how that works with the saints?

One prayer we can say any time of day is the Jesus prayer: Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Recognize the Lord

We can all turn it around. Some time later, Martha's brother Lazarus died. Jesus was summoned there. It was so long after he died that she didn't expect much but was glad he was there. This time, though, something was very different for her. She had time for a conversation with Jesus. John's gospel tells us about an one of the top three amazing conversations of the Good News. It was about eternal life. She didn't miss it when he looked at her with great love and said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Now listen to her answer, the answer of one who has learned to pray. She said to him: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming in to the world." Martha came to understand the one thing necessary, even in the face of the loss of her beloved brother. That one thing is Jesus.

The next time we are tempted to say, Lord do you not care about me, about my burdens, about my life, about the injustices committed against me, let us hear Jesus answer us: Of course, I care. Don't you know I gave my whole life to serve

you. I submitted my human will to the divine will that you should know my plan to save you from the sin of busy-ness that wants to swallow you whole.

Do not leave today without committing to doing one thing to increase your prayer life. Hear him speak then respond in love. That's the greatest mystery.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The Lord sustains my soul. I will sacrifice to you with willing heart and praise you name, O Lord.*

Collect: *O Lord, mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that your servant may be ever watchful in keeping your commands.*

Genesis: *The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre in the heat of the day. When he saw three men standing near him, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My Lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves." Abraham hastened to Sarah and said, "Make ready choice flour and make cakes." Abraham took a tender calf and asked the servant to prepare. Then he took curds and milk and the calf, set it before them; and he stood by while they ate. They said to Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?" He said, "There in the tent." The one said, "I will return to you in due season and your wife Sarah shall have a son.*

Psalms: *Whoever walks blamelessly and does what is right, and speaks the truth from their heart; Whoever does no evil to a friend; Whoever stands by their oath even to their hurt; Who does not lend money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. One who does these things shall never be moved.*

Colossians: *Brothers and sisters, I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body that is, the Church. I became its servant to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages but has now been revealed to his saints. It is Christ whom we proclaim, warning every person and teaching every person, so that we may present every person mature in Christ.*

Luke: *Jesus entered a village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to Jesus and asked, " Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."*