

Homily For Tuesday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - July 23, 2019

Ex. 14:15-15:21 "Israel saw the work the Lord did. So they believed in the Lord and his servant Moses."

Psalm 69 "Let us sing to the Lord. He has covered himself in glory."

Matthew 12:46-50 "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

What's In A Family

The

A priest at a former parish had a particular way of blessing mothers and fathers on Mother's Day. He would ask the mothers to stand up and ask God's blessing on them and on all who do motherly things. The same he would do for Father's Day.

A word can hold within it a very specific and special meaning. Words can also be used to try to be inclusive and cover a wide range of meanings. I know that priest was trying to expand the idea of mothering as something we can all participate in some way, and it was kind of cute and always made people smile.

Matthew

The issue to which Jesus brings focus is about what it means to be a mother or brother or sister. Those who are his disciples will have a relationship with him that is deeper than natural family bonds. He says that whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister and mother.

Some have used this passage to undermine the importance of Jesus' own natural mother, Mary. That idea suggests that she gave birth to him, but that biological fact is no longer important. Our Catholic view is the exact opposite. What we see over and over again is that Mary meets all of the criteria for what it means to be a faithful disciple. She trusts God totally and cooperates fully with God's plan of salvation, even before she fully understands it. This makes her, not just the natural mother of Jesus but also the most important of disciples in the new family of God. This is the grace of God building on the nature that God has given us through natural family ways of being.

The Sea To Freedom

The Israelites for centuries had only known what it means to be God's people in the context of being slaves. They had not yet experienced lives of freedom to be God's family. They were at the shore of the Red Sea after the ten plagues and the Passover event, finally about to become a people with their own identity, an absolutely unique identity given to them by the God of creation and the God of promises. But that possibility was about to be lost before it began.

There is much to fathom in the event of the escape of the people from their former slave masters. Everyone in both nations was used to the relationship of slavery. It was hard to break. It points out at the beginning of the passage, that "Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and his army pursued them, so as to enslave them once again." He wanted to renew that relationship. And, as much as the people didn't enjoy the increasing level of suffering and death they experienced at the hands of those slave masters, it was all that anyone from both sides was familiar with.

The Jewish commentary, called the Midrash, explains that, as they watched Pharaoh's army come closer, the people were divided into four possible actions. There were those who said, "Let us throw ourselves into the sea rather than go back to slavery." A second group said, "Let us return to Egypt willingly rather than forcibly." A third faction argued, "Let us turn and fight them." But there were some who said, "Let us pray to God to save us."

Knowing God's ultimate victory, we might naturally say, yes let's pray. But the commentary says that Moses rejected all four options, saying to the people, "Fear not. Stand by and see the salvation of God which He will show you today. God shall fight for you, and you shall be silent." On that day, with the seemingly impossible situation before them, Moses was telling them that God is in charge, God has brought you this far, and God will not abandon you. Watch and see.

The way this event is told in the book of Exodus makes the sea the key focus of attention. Nineteen times, just in our passage, reference is made to the sea or to

the waters. We should always pay attention to such things. It's no accident or because the writer couldn't think of any other words to use.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, the sea is the place of disorder and chaos. It's the place of storms and monsters. It's dangerous and unpredictable. But, most of all, it is what existed before God created the world and the garden and life. God's Spirit hovered over the waters until God separated the waters below from the waters above. Then God made dry land appear, separating the water from the land.

We can see images of creation as the story of the crossing of the Red Sea. There is absolute chaos until God separates the dry land from the water. And those who are cooperating with God's plan experience increasing separation from the chaos. And those who seek to thwart God's plan are thrown into the chaos.

At that moment, the people really get it. They sing because they have been brought through the chaos and out of the chaos, to become a people in intimate relationship with God. Moses invited the people to come out of the chaos and be a free people. Free to become part of a God's family.

The New Family of God

When the world starts to redefine mothering and family, we must notice that we are being drawn into a new kind of slavery that will result in our destruction. The redefinition of family that is taking place all around us has become so inclusive that, from this shore where we stand, we can see the approach of a kind of darkness and chaos. It's a disintegration, a tearing down.

When Jesus redefines family, he draws us upwards into order and into the deeper mystery of what it means to be family. He builds on natural family: mothers, brothers, sisters and gives it greater meaning. A disciple is one who sits at the feet of Jesus and absorbs the order which keeps away the chaos.

Let us today be disciples. Let us sit at his feet and be drawn up into his true family, into freedom. Let us sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously.