

Homily For Friday of the 18th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 8, 2024

Nahum 1,2&3 (parts) "The Lord is restoring the majesty of Israel."

Canticle Deut 32:35-41 "The Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants."

Matthew 16:24-28 "The Son of Man will repay everyone for what he has done."

Embracing the Cross

Introduction

There are some joyful parts of being a Christian. We celebrate the many ways God is good to us. I notice the younger school children really relate to this. Many times, even when they have experienced trauma in their lives, they have a natural joy. When we tell them that this is God's plan for them, they accept it with that same joy. Only in the later grades do I notice that the joy is tempered by anxieties about who they are, how they will get by in the world, whether they will be accepted or known. It becomes much more of a challenge to assure them of God's love and acceptance, but also how they are to participate in that love and acceptance in their behaviour towards others. Life becomes more of a cross for them.

On this Friday, as we do every Friday, we remember Good Friday, the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. If we are willing, we seek to participate in that sacrifice. And so we deny ourselves to unite ourselves to his sacrifice. We need to learn that this sacrifice, this kind of suffering, is not pointless, as the world sees it. It is redemptive. It is an offering to God and to others. It is the way of love.

Matthew

One Catholic Bible scholar explains that taking up the cross is done in three steps. First step in following Christ is to deny ourselves. Without this we won't be ready to serve others. We will be too absorbed in ourselves. Those who are not ready to do this can only see the cross as loss, with no hope for redemption. This is why

Catholics practice small sacrifices on Fridays. With this practice, step two of following Christ becomes possible, which is the willingness to sacrifice ourselves for others, out of love.

Once we are willing to do this for love, then we are ready for the third step, which is to trust in Jesus who holds nothing back in his love for us. That's when his words start to make more sense. He says that you can gain the whole world but lose your souls for eternal life. All the goods and power and money and land gains us nothing compared to eternal life. It is Christians who have a hope of heaven and an eternal life with God. For this greater good, we are willing to sacrifice the things we have here on earth, even our bodies. We lay down our lives for others, whether in word or deed or prayer.

In the world, suffering and sacrifice have little meaning. That's why those attracted to worldly goods avoid crosses at all cost. The Christian can agree with this worldly view in the sense that, without the redemptive suffering of Christ out of love, suffering appears of little value.

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”. Any true love engenders, one way or other, some sort of sacrifice, but not all sacrifice engenders love. God is not sacrifice. God is love, and only from that perspective can pain, fatigue and the cross in our lives, have any meaning. St. Augustine put it like this: “When one loves, one does not suffer; but if one does suffer, the very suffering is loved.”

Our human tendency is to ask: “Why is God sending this suffering to me?” Instead, we should learn how to change that question into a sharing of Christ's suffering. In the same way that his death became his resurrection, we can ask: “How can I transform this cross into an act of faith and love?” In this way, we are able to truly follow Christ from suffering to grace.

Nahum

Not much is known about Nahum except the name of his home town, but even the precise location of that town is uncertain. In all three chapters, Nahum prophesied Nineveh's fall, which happened in 612 BC. The name Nahum means comfort or consolation. During Jonah's time Nineveh repented and their destruction was temporarily averted. Not long after that, however, Nineveh reverted to its extreme wickedness, brutality and pride. The Lord's judgment falls on them for their oppression, cruelty, idolatry and wickedness. God's righteousness and just kingdom will ultimately triumph, while kingdoms built on wickedness and tyranny must eventually fall. Nahum also declares the universal sovereignty of God, who is the Lord of history and all nations, and who controls destinies.

Call To Action

Jesus did not seek the suffering that was laid upon him, but he did embrace it as an offering of himself for us all. On this Friday, let us again deny ourselves small things so that we may be ready to embrace what comes our way. It is not easy, but we can prepare ourselves for it little by little, especially when we realize that the reward for this embracing our crosses is out of this world.