

Homily For Tuesday of the 19th Week of Ordinary Time- Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 11, 2020

St. Clare

Ezekiel 2:8-3:4 "In my mouth, the scroll (God's words) was as sweet as honey. He said: speak to Israel."

Psalm 119:14++ "How sweet are your words. With open mouth I pant, because I long for your law."

Matt 18:1-5,10,12-14 "You must change and become like children ... their angels see the face of God."

Sweet As Honey

Introduction

When words are repeated several times in a passage of Sacred Scripture, they are meant for the reader or listener to pay very close attention to their meaning. If we do that today, we will be drawn, in Ezekiel, to eating a scroll containing God's words. In the Gospel of Matthew, it is about children and entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is a beautiful pattern here that is not all that obvious at first. In a nutshell, heaven is the destiny of God's children and, secondly, the path to that destiny is a kind of humble and total receptivity.

Kingdom of Heaven

Discussion about the kingdom of heaven is so common in the Gospels, especially in Matthew, that we might be tempted to pass it by just a little bit casually. Combined with that, we live and breathe in a culture that has come to ridicule heaven as an unscientific concept to which only a few religious people hold on to like a crutch.

A better way to approach heaven is that is the salvation of God, offered as a free gift from the creator of life, a path to return to intimacy with the one who seeks our true happiness and joy, rather than as a prize given to the winners of a competition.

We fall into the exact same trap as did the disciples. This particular conversation with Jesus today follows closely after Jesus made Peter the authoritative leader of the disciples and the rock foundation of his future Church. We can well imagine, then, that the rest wonder where they fit in. Peter seems to have his status affirmed. What about us, they wonder. Who is the greatest in heaven?

Here is where Jesus provides some shocking criteria for heaven:

You must change: Who wants to change? Not me. I've spent my life crafting my identity. If I wanted to change, I would already have done it. Even if I know I need to change in some ways, change is really hard work.

You must become like children: Children had a relatively low status. They spent their lives, as we do, moving away from childhood dependency and limits of knowledge and capacities. Who wants to go back there. But here is the key. It is a particular quality of childhood.

You must become humble: I think you know that we do not promote a culture of humility. From Adam and Eve, we want it all and we want it our way. Humility means being engaged in a constant battle against that desire in us. Who wants heaven if that is the competition you have to win.

You must welcome those children: Part of the path to salvation is recognizing and embracing those who have the heavenly qualities, those disciples who have embraced a life of profound humble self sacrifice. But there is really no way to do that unless we embrace the path of humility ourselves. We will just become jealous, as the disciples seemed to be doing.

God's Words

This path is exactly what God's message to Ezekiel was for the people of Israel. The prophet was asked by God, in a profound vision, to experience directly what he wants all the people to get, so that they will understand it as authentically from God.

Mortal, do not be rebellious: Doing your own thing is a rebellion against God's plan for individuals and all humanity. Remember that you are mortal. You will die physically regardless. But, in your rebellion, you will also die spiritually.

Open your mouth and eat what I give you: I grew with the absolute rule that there was no dessert until I had eaten the main course, no matter how much I may not have liked it. But obedience was the key to receiving the sweet dessert.

I ate the scroll: To eat God's words, chew on them and fill my stomach with them, digest them, is to take to heart God himself, to receive willingly and obediently the message of salvation. The one who does that humbly or, in Jesus' image, like a child, will find the taste like the sweetest and most pleasant of all things, like honey. All throughout the Old Testament, including today's psalm. The climactic words are: The law of your mouth is better to me than gold. With open mouth, I long for your commandments.

St. Clare

What a great model of heavenly beauty and childlike humility is St. Clare, the sister of St. Francis. She meditated deeply on the humility of Jesus Christ himself, who came as a child, to show the world this quality of the kingdom of heaven, which is really just Christ himself. She suggests looking at Christ as in a mirror, see his poverty of spirit, and receive it into ourselves as our own image.

Call To Action

Do you find God's word as a treasure and sweet? That's what we are invited to do. The more we treasure God, the more we will treasure his word, and the more we read his word, the more we will fall in love with God. Deepening reverence and love for both. Heaven is the result of obedience, of receptivity, of humility. May we think of God's word as sweet as honey.

Reception of Jesus today, in the Holy Eucharist, physically or spiritually, is intended by God and offered by the Church, as sweetness of his presence, not just in our mouths and stomachs, but in the core of our being. Shall we ask St. Clare to help us look deeply into the sweetness of Christ and consume it as a child?