

Homily For Tuesday of the 19th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 13, 2024

Ezekiel 2:8-3:4 "In my mouth, the scroll was as sweet as honey."

Psalms 119:14-17 "With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments."

Matt 18:1-5,10,12-14 "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter ... heaven."

The Greatest In Heaven

Introduction

We have been watching people become Olympic champions in many sports. A very human thing to do is to lift up and honour those who are the best at something. These men and women are great in the kingdom of the world. Looking at it in a positive light, we are acknowledging human skills, given by God, and developed by dedication and hard work.

We can also see and hear in the behaviour and speech of those champions that some give credit to all those who helped them get there. Some even acknowledge God. Sadly, I think, others are simply proud of themselves and their accomplishments, the worst of those strutting and swaggering.

Matthew

But the Gospel reveals God's heart to us, that his greatest care is for the smallest ones, those who nobody ever pays any attention to; those who do not attain whatever the rest of the world thinks is great. But it's not just his care for those smallest ones. It is his command that everyone become like them. Some are made small by the world so, in a way, they are already there. But for most of us, it is the becoming small that God values. Who would deny that St. Therese of Lisieux is a spiritual gold medalist. But of herself she says: "I am a very little soul who can offer only very little things to God."

The disciples ask: "Who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Most of the time, when Jesus answers this question, it's not about who will be the greatest,

but rather, who will even be in God's kingdom. After all, there is an equality of greatness experienced by anyone in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus gives a shocking answer. He answers a question they did not ask. If you even want to be in the kingdom of heaven, you have to become like children. The answer is that it is the little ones who are destined for heaven. You had better become like them. You had better welcome them when you see them. And most of all, the warning that you had better not get in their way. To welcome a little one is to welcome Jesus and conversely. There are also some “small ones” who are like sheep gone astray. The Father is most pleased when they come back home.

Humility is not important in the world. But everything we have is a gift from God. It would be ridiculous for me to boast. We are to treat others as more important than ourselves. That's the secret to the kingdom of heaven. Heaven 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. There are some key elements of this kind of greatness:

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: We spend their lives 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.

You must welcome those children: The path to salvation involves recognizing and embracing those who have the heavenly qualities of 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.

Ezekiel

God tells the prophet Ezekiel to do something strange. In his vision, he receives a scroll with writing on it. He is to eat the scroll with God's words. Ezekiel eats the scroll and finds it as sweet as honey, which is the sweetest thing in the ancient Middle East. Then God tells him to speak to a rebellious people, a people who have become proud. They are definitely not small. The antidote to this pride begins with the prophet consuming and absorbing entirely into himself God's holy word, which is sweet.

He is to let himself be transformed by what he takes in, then bring that presence into a proud and rebellious world. This prefigures the sacraments. God takes ordinary things, places himself into those ordinary things, gives them to us, then asks us to bring our transformed selves to wherever we go.

Call To Conversion

If we put these readings together, we see that to eat God's words, chew on them and fill our minds and hearts and 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. Like the psalmist says: "With open mouth, I long for your commandments."

The world answers the disciples' question with something like 'You must become the best version of yourself, whatever that means. But Jesus asks us to turn and become like children. We do that by letting the sweetness of God enter us and so be transformed. The more we treasure God, the more we will treasure his word, and the more we read and contemplate his word, the more we will fall in love with God, becoming little children fit for the kingdom of heaven.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The Lord speaks of peace to his people, to those who turn to him.*

Collect: *Stir up the will of your faithful, O Lord, that they may receive the healing remedies your kindness bestows.*

Ezekiel: *Thus says the Lord: But you, mortal, do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He said to me, O mortal, eat this scroll and go speak to the house of Israel. Then I ate it, and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. He said: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them.*

Psalm: *I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. They are my delight. They are my counsellors. How sweet are your words. Your decrees are my heritage. With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments.*

Matthew: *The disciples asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus called a child, whom he put among them, and said: Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the others who never went astray. So, it is not the will of my Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.*