

Homily For Tuesday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - August 20, 2019

Feast of St. Bernard - Memorial

Judges 6:11-24 "Gideon said: Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face."

Psalms 85: 8-13 "God, the Lord, will speak peace to his people, to his faithful."

Matt. 19:23-30 "They were greatly astounded. Then who can be saved? For God all things are possible."

Who Can Be Saved?

Introduction

There is a passage, from the book of Daniel, which, in a long litany, invites all of creation to bless the Lord. Two of the lines go like this: "Fire and heat, bless the Lord. Cold and chill, bless the Lord." Both of these extreme images, of hot and cold, can also be images of relationship with God. St. Bernard, whose love for Christ we honour today, chose to enter the Cistercian order because he thought his personality was unruly and that he needed to tame it, or to cool it down in order to make him more open to God. In that sense, fire and heat can be destructive. On the other hand, fire is also a symbol of zeal for God. It seems that one of the key things for this saint is that he was on fire for God. Because of that, he was known all over Europe and was canonized only twenty years after his death.

Gideon

In our first reading from the Book of Judges, God literally causes fire to consume Gideon's offering. However, what we note before that, is that Gideon already had that kind of love and zeal for God. We know this because this was a time of great turning away from God. The rest of Gideon's family were worshipping Baal. They even had a statue and an altar to that god in their family home. He was the last member of his family to remain faithful.

Even though he is very discouraged by the apostasy around him, as we might be by the same loss of faith around us, it is because his heart had not grown cold

towards God that he was able to recognize the angelic manifestation of God which came to visit him. After a conversation with God, Gideon was inspired to break the evil hold of the false god, Baal. How did he do that? He made a sacrifice of food and drink, placing it on a rock. God, or God's angel, caused fire to come up out of the rock and consume the sacrifice. This was a solemn ceremony by which a new altar was consecrated, a new presence of God established in Gideon's family. He even named the altar.

Being Rich Won't Save You

The rich young man, from yesterday's gospel passage, who approached Jesus, had a certain zeal for God, but his focus needed to be corrected. We heard him ask, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He just wanted to know what one more thing he had to do to graduate. Jesus led him to realize that it will take more than moral uprightness. There is no heavenly insurance policy that you can buy with either your good works, and certainly not with your wealth.

Jesus tells his disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples were greatly astounded. He seemed like the perfect candidate for entry into the heavenly realm.

But Jesus is concerned about wealth's ability to reduce our sense of dependency on God. The things we have can make us feel secure while keeping the Lord at arm's length. No amount of wealth or even good works will enable a person to reach eternal life. By the grace of God only can we receive what we could never achieve by nature. Only through that means can eternal life be ours.

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Gideon asked, "How am I going to deliver my people? I am weak and the lowest of my family. God answered, "The Lord is with you. I am sending you, and I will be with you." The disciples ask, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answered that for mortals it is impossible but for God all things are possible.

Gideon offered a sacrifice of food and he offered himself. The disciples had done the same. Deliverance – salvation – would surely be the reward in both cases.

God is faithful even when the people are not. This is the promise of every sacrament. God will be present and we will fail him and each other, but God will be present. He will remind us of our vows. He will be our strength when we are weak. He will be our courage when we think the battle is lost. He will be our love when we feel most alone.

St. Bernard describes the fire of this saving love. The sole purpose of love, he says, is to be loved, in the knowledge that those who love him are made happy by their love of him ... It is true that the creature loves less because he is less. But if he loves with her whole being, nothing is lacking where everything is given.

What are we to do to be save? Everything I am, I offer to Jesus, the one who gave me myself, then gave himself for me. Everything I have, I lay down on the altar of your sacrifice. I cannot enter heaven with any of the things with which I surround myself. Everything I want to be, I let go of so that you can fill me with a true sense of who I am in you, and who you call me to become.