

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 18, 2020

Ezekiel 28:1-10 "Because you compare your mind with a god, strangers shall defile your splendour."

Deut 32:26-39 "I thought to blot out their memory, but their enemies might misunderstand."

Matt 19:23-30 "Everyone who has left family for my sake will inherit eternal life."

Remember That You Will Die

Introduction

I always liked the story of the Prince of a city who had assigned a particular servant the one and only task of following him around and reminding him at key points: Remember, your majesty, that you will die. It sounds like that servant had a pretty easy job. However, he would not only have to say those words. He would have to be able to discern when to say them. He would have to have some kind of insight into the moments when his master was particularly tempted to depend on his royal status or his wealth rather than on the needs of his people.

The Latin term is 'memento mori'. There have been communities where Christians have greeted each other that way. Instead of: Good morning, how are you? It would be: Good morning, remember that you will die. No matter how cheerfully you say it, that can sound morbid or negative but, if we listen carefully to God today, it could save us for our eternal life.

Ezekiel: Prophetic Message

In the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, God is speaking, not just to the people of Israel, like we are used to, but also to other nations. He speaks to the rest of the nations about the eternal values of the kingdom of heaven and the false values of the world.

The king of Tyre has set himself up as a god. But God mocks him. I am a god, you say, yet you are a mortal. You don't seem to know that you will die. And, while you live, you imagine yourself having divine wisdom. O yes, you have wisdom, alright. But your wisdom is only about the ways to be successful in the world that

will be lost to you when you die, as you surely must. All you have done with this wisdom is amass earthly wealth. But I tell you that you will be crushed by the hand of foreigners. You will have no control over your life or your death.

The psalmist today reminds us about the one who has true authority over life and death. Spoiler alert: It's not us, even the most powerful in the world. It is not just the most wealthy or powerful who are tempted by this false wisdom. It is all of us. We are part of a culture that seeks its highest ideals in the wisdom and knowledge of this world. As we discover many things, we imagine that we have less and less need of God, or even that we are a kind of god.

Fulfilment in Jesus

Jesus is concerned with those who feel secure while keeping the Lord at arm's length, making wealth, or the pursuit of it, a roadblock to eternal life. How hard is it for a rich man to enter heaven. It's harder than a camel, the largest domesticated animal, going through the eye of a needle.

St. Thomas More thought it was an error of translation. He thought that the Greek word translated 'camel' was really a similar sounding word in Greek, meaning a 'rope'. That would make more sense, since one could actually try to thread a needle with a rope would, but it would be very difficult.

Regardless of the translation, the challenge of wealth is that it usually takes a great deal of effort and a great deal of focus to obtain it. How hard it is not to be proud of the accomplishment of what we have gained through our efforts. Also, how hard it is to focus on the relationship with our creator and God when we have spent so much of our focus on obtaining worldly goods. The heart gradually comes to commit itself to accumulation. That's why most of us have so much baggage that we have to get rid of before we die. Finally, we realize the saying that you can't take it with you.

Finally, it hits us why the disciples were astounded at what Jesus said to them. If we are truly wise, finally it will hit us that we have depended on our riches, that we have become proud of our efforts to gain it.

Jesus answers Peter's question - What about us? What will we obtain? - with a Greek term for the future which means a new beginning. The only other occurrence in the New Testament refers to regeneration of the believer through baptism.

We are typically living in fear of death, right now because of covid-19, a future death. But we have already died in Christ in baptism. As St. Paul says: The life I live now is no longer mine. We are now alive in Christ.

Call To Action

St. Thomas was willing to give up his attachments: His freedom, his estate, his life. What can we do in our daily life and our daily prayer to keep a focus on what is most important and reduce? How can we today lessen our attachment on what is desired and sought after by the world but which has no lasting value and, in fact, may keep us from that surpassing value?

Well, we could ask a friend to follow us around and remind us: memento mori - Remember that you will die. A bit impractical, even though we might know someone ready and willing to do that for us.

We could come up with a memory tool catch phrase, something like: Hold your material wealth lightly. Hold your spiritual wealth tightly.

We could say to ourselves daily in prayer: memento mori - remember that you will die. Remember that you have died in Christ. Remember that you have also been raised to new life in him, not by your own wisdom, or effort, or wealth.

I know that today, we could also make the prayer we are about to say very personal when we say it: May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May your will be done in me as it is in heaven.

Key Passages

Ezekiel: *To the prince of Tyre: Because your heart is proud and you have said: I am a god ... Yet you are but a mortal, and no god ... By your wisdom and your understanding you have amassed wealth for yourself ... and your heart has become proud in your wealth ... Because you compare your mind with the mind of a god, strangers shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendour. Will you still say: I am a god, in the presence of those who kill you?*

Canticle (Dt 32): *The Lord said: I thought to blot out the memory of them from humanity; but I feared provocation by the enemy. for their adversaries might misunderstand. Let them not say: Our hand is triumphant. It was not the Lord who did all this ... There is no understanding in them.*

Matthew: *Truly I telly you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle ... They were greatly astounded and said: Then who can be saved. But Jesus looked at them and said: For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible. Peter said: Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? Truly I tell you, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones. And everyone who has left (family or land) for my name's sake, will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.*