

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

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 23, 2024

Ezekiel 37:1-4 "The Lord set me down in the middle of a valley full of dry bones."

Psalm 107: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever."

Matthew 22:34-40 "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Entrance Antiphon: *O Lord, I trust in your merciful love. My heart will rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.*

Collect: *We pray, almighty God that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you.*

Dry Bones No More

Introduction

A priest tells the story about how he came to a new parish where he was told there had not been an adult baptism for five years. Immediately, he knew his task was to set about to the task of raising a community from a kind of lifelessness.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel's vision from God of the lifeless dry bones in the desert has two aspects. First, it is the complaint of the people in exile. We are like dry bones, they lament. It is how they feel as exiles. It feels like they are dead in a foreign land. But dead, dry bones is also their spiritual state, which caused them to be in exile in the first place. They had turned away from the source of their life. In that way, they **should** feel like they are dead and dried up. That is an appropriate sense. Because, when they are in that state, they are then receptive to the prophecy that God is able to give them life from death. They are now ready to receive a message of hope, that they will not always be in a lifeless existence.

This passage beautifully illustrates the Catholic Church's approach to understanding all of Sacred Scripture. There are four ways to understand the bible. There is what is called the literal sense of the passage, which is understanding the straightforward meaning of the text. Well, God is telling the people who are literally in exile, that it's not the end and that God will return

them to their land. Then there is the spiritual sense of the passage. The spiritual sense is divided into three. The first of those three is the symbolic meaning. Well, we have symbol all over the place. The loss of hope of the people is symbolized by the graphic image of the scattered dead dry bones of the whole people of Israel. They are like dry bones which will be restored to life, with sinew and flesh and finally, the breath of life itself. The second spiritual sense is the moral meaning. What does the passage tell us about how should we live? Israel is called to live as a people whose only hope is in the Lord and who worship only God. The third spiritual sense has to do with Jesus. We believe that all of Sacred Scripture is about Jesus, the Son of God, who saves his people. Our Lord was dead on a Friday. But on Sunday, he was raised from that death.

The path from life to death is a human journey without God. Physically, it will happen. That's the way it is. But the path from death to life is animated by God alone. God is the one who rescues. How far does he go to do this? He dies on a cross for the sins of all. But he conquers that sin, that death. Even if we die, we are not outside of God's realm, unlike in the world where we have to rescue people before it's too late. Faith tells us that God can rescue us even when we are in the grave. He will breathe his spirit into our revived bodies. First the body, then the spirit.

Matthew

The Gospel passage begins with the Pharisees hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. In their conversation about this, we do not get any sense that this silencing had some merit that they should pay attention to. They are like the dry bones. They are dead to the meaning of Jesus' previous answer to the Sadducees. They have only the desire to kill him who is life.

One of them, a teacher of the law asks Jesus: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" The most important one is the first commandment. The answer, however, speaks of a first commandment and of a second commandment. They are inseparable, but there is a first one and a second one, a golden one and a

silver one. "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

There is a commentary on the two parts of the Lord's Cross. The vertical beam looks from heaven to earth and earth to heaven. The horizontal beam represents the relations between people. The horizontal beam would be at ground level if we did not have the vertical beam to hold it up. So the more we desire to raise the level of our service to others horizontally, the taller our love for God must go.

Call To Conversion

How would we know if the image of dry bones applies to us? Physical death is never the problem, but only spiritual death. As individuals, we know people, perhaps even ourselves, who sometimes feel abandoned and in a kind of exile from ourselves and God. The command to love God is total. We cannot settle for mediocrity. That is death as surely as false worship. Love of God and neighbour does not leave room for death.

We do not come to church to attend the service as a spectator, but in order, along with the priest, to serve God. Everything we do, our entering, being present, our kneeling and sitting and standing, our reception of the sacred nourishment, is aimed at the source of life and love. In the world around us, the world of dry bones, he *will* breathe life into our dry bones.