

Homily For Tuesday of the 22nd Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - Sept. 3, 2024

(Memorial - St. Gregory the Great)

1 Cor 2:10-16 "We have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God."

Psalms 145:8-14 "The Lord is gracious and merciful."

Luke 4:31-37 "With authority and power he commands the unclean spirits."

What the Spirit Reveals

Introduction

If you were to go to the Sea of Galilee today, you would come eventually to a modern sign on a gate, which identifies that first century city called Capernaum, with both its modern church, but also its preserved ancient synagogue. Now, when we read in the Gospel: "Jesus went down to Capernaum in Galilee," the events that follow are grounded in the physical evidence that the man Jesus truly walked and spoke and healed and cast out demonic spirits. This reality, this historical truth, prepares us to receive the further reality and truth that the same man, with the Holy Spirit of God operating fully in him, refused worldly security and safety to offer himself as a living sacrifice to rescue us from spiritual death.

Luke

The central focus of Jesus' ministry is to reclaim the physical world for the reign of God. Now, in the City of Capernaum, the battle begins. This exorcism, and the cure that follows it, take place on the Sabbath. God's kingdom is revealed on the day of the Lord. 'They' were all amazed by this. Now this is a very practical and proper use of the plural pronoun 'they.' It was a crowd. It included men and women. Physical language is meant to bring clarity, not confusion. Used badly, it can be used to separate us from the reality of how we were made by God.

Jesus was close to human situations. He could combine His divine authority with the most incredible human simplicity. "The fact that God permits physical and even moral evil is a mystery that God illuminates by his Son Jesus Christ who died and rose to vanquish evil.

1 Corinthians

St. Paul's argument in the second chapter of his letter to the Corinthians is that we know about worldly and human things. But if we want to understand the deeper spiritual meaning of our physical lives, we need the Holy Spirit, which understands the depths of God. We cannot access this wisdom on our own, but we have access to it through baptism and through faith.

Paul suggests there are those who are spiritual and those who are unspiritual. And yet, so many today will tell you that they are spiritual but not religious. This statement recognizes that we do have a spiritual aspect to our nature. The demon knows that much. It recognizes who Jesus is but will not submit to him. This attitude (spiritual but not religious) closes off the door to receiving the Spirit of God. I have my spirit, by which I understand and live my life, but I refuse God's Spirit, which would give me a profound understanding of the deeper meaning of my life.

Without the Spirit and wisdom of God, the crucifixion looks like an absolute failure. That is why Jesus could say from the cross: "They do not know what they are doing." For us now, failure to identify the wisdom of God in Christ crucified reveals the absence of Spirit of God.

But when we judge things with the spirit of God, a spiritual dimension opens up to us. The Eucharist makes little sense without this divine understanding. But with the mind and heart of Christ, we are able to see how his Spirit is not relegated to the past but remains with us in a profound and ever new way.

There is a spirit of the world, which only understands things of the material world, unconnected with a deeper spirit. It is divided from the Spirit of God. Then there is that Spirit of God, which we know as the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, which reveals to us as the One who inspires our faith and our actions.

St. Gregory the Great

Pope St. Gregory the Great, whom we honour today, talks of this difference in terms of love, which is the greatest spiritual gift. He says: "The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist." So physical works take on spiritual meaning through God, who IS love.

St. Gregory was a 6th century successor to Peter, the first monk to become Pope. He was the son of a wealthy Roman senator. His mother and two of his aunts are also saints, which is a nice influence to have. Discerning a call to the religious life, he sold all of his possessions and converted his home into a Benedictine monastery. During his lifetime Rome was sacked by invading barbarian hordes and he guided the Church through that time of great chaos.

Only two other popes have this title, although many already call Pope St. John Paul II as 'the Great.' Gregory is called 'Great', not because of any power of his own but because he conformed himself to the greatness of God. He is most commonly known for promoting and standardizing the sacred music of liturgical worship, now called "Gregorian Chant."

Call To Conversion

What is the deeper meaning of your life and mine? No human wisdom, invention or technology will save us from our broken human nature. The spirit and wisdom of the world acting in me hates the idea that I am a hopeless sinner in absolute need of God's mercy. Only with the mind of Christ can I admit that sad reality and yet, at the same time, have access to the astounding reality that God would not leave me alone with my sin. He has come for us. He has given himself for all who would allow themselves to be pervaded by the Spirit of God and the mind of Christ.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Blessed Gregory, raised upon the throne of Peter, sought always the beauty of the Lord and lived in celebration of that love.*

Collect: *O God, who care for your people with gentleness and love, through the intercession of Pope Saint Gregory, endow with a spirit of wisdom those to whom you have given authority to govern, that the flourishing of a holy flock may become the eternal joy of the shepherds.*

1 Corinthians: *The Spirit searches even the depths of God ... A human being knows what is truly human through the spirit within ... We have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us ... We are not taught by human wisdom but by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, which are spiritually discerned ... We have the mind of Christ.*

Psalm: *All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you ... Your faithful make known to all people your mighty deeds.*

Luke: *Jesus went down to Capernaum in Galilee and was teaching them on the Sabbath. They were astounded because he spoke with authority ... The spirit of an unclean demon cried out: let us alone, Jesus of Nazareth! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying: Be silent, and come out of him! They were all amazed: With authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!*