

Homily for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C

St. Peter's 8:00/9:30/11:30 Sunday Masses - Feb 20, 2022

1 Samuel 26:2-25 "Who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?"

Psalms 103:1-13 "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is in me bless his holy name."

1 Cor 15:45-49 "As we bear the image of the one of dust, we will bear the image of the one of heaven."

Luke 6:27-38 "Love your enemies ... Your reward will be great & you will be children of the Most High."

Keeping Body and Soul Together

Introduction

Yogi Bear was a cartoon character always on the lookout for a picnic basket he could steal from visitors to Jellystone Park. Life is simple for him. Get the picnic basket and avoid the park ranger. As far as I know, he didn't think about whether it was right or wrong. He was just always hungry and so it always seemed right to feed his physical body.

Yogi Berra was a catcher for the New York Yankees. He is credited with some interesting sayings. One of them is this: "When you get to the fork in the road, take it." I think of that as spiritual advice. Make a decision which path to walk.

There seem to be multiple ways to think or behave. But when we look closely there are almost always just two paths. You can study the cosmos out there, the seemingly infinitely large, or you can study the interior universe, the almost infinitely small. Mathematical formulas result in trends towards zero or infinity.

While life can be complicated, if we listen to Jesus long enough, it is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that we have two choices. We are moving towards God or we are moving away from God. Sometimes it appears that there is a third option, which is being neutral, just hanging out. But that turns out to be just another way of moving away from God. There is no such thing as just standing still. Jesus himself refers over and over again to two destinies: the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan.

There is a story of a grandfather who was teaching his grandson about the battle within each one of us. He said "There are two wolves at battle within each of us. One wolf is evil and represents fear. The other is good and represents hope." The grandson asked his grandfather, "which one will win?" to which he answers, "The one you feed." That makes it simple. Feed the hope and don't feed the fear. Nourish one and starve the other. Feed our relationship with God and don't feed the despair of not knowing God. Today we learn that there are two totally opposite ways of approaching life.

1 Corinthians

Before we get to Jesus, St. Paul describes what makes up the human person. We are like Adam, who is made from the earth. That's what his name means. But we are made in the image of God. We carry the dust with us but we are made for spiritual life.

Paul has been describing what the resurrection will be like. He talks of a physical body and a spiritual body. Going from one to the other means to be transformed in some way. This transformed body is not merely flesh and blood. It has been changed from one kind of glory to another. It has been transformed from the glory or image of Adam, representing mortal earthly existence, into the glory or image of Christ, the man of heaven, representing immortal existence.

The Gospel events are set in the middle of a world of Greek culture. The Greeks had a high regard for the spiritual element in the human person, while holding negative views of the body. They see it as a prison for the soul. To raise a dead and corrupting body was, first, impossible, but also kind of repugnant and undesirable. We are inheritors of that Greek mindset.

But Christian believers are not just human, for God's spirit dwells in us. The resurrection is not rising back to a material reconstitution of the body that died, but to a spiritual body with a new glory. The first Adam could only give us a physical body. But Jesus, whom we call the second Adam, has been glorified. He is in heaven. The Spirit which raised him from the dead he now makes available to all. The human 'me' is both a body and soul. To be fully saved and raised to glory

with Christ, all of the 'me' must be raised. We tend to think in the physical. That's why it bothers us that someone may have lived for themselves all their life, then makes a death bed conversion, as if they have gotten away with something. This is the thinking that the pleasures of this world are what everyone really wants that they are the best we

1 Samuel

The lives of David and Saul exemplify the two paths. Saul is the first king of Israel, anointed by the prophet Samuel. Anointed means set apart for God's purpose. But Saul has turned away from God. He's doing things his own way, with human ideas. Because of this he has become so jealous of David's success that he tries to kill him - several times. David is a man after God's own heart. He is anointed to be the next king. It will be his line from which comes the saviour of the world, Jesus. He sins also, but always turns radically back to God. Two kings. Two paths.

Saul doesn't just go after David. He brings his best 3000 men to pursue David and a few dozen friends. Saul has David trapped. The next day it will be all over. But David and Abishai, sneaks into Saul's camp. He knows God is with him because none of them wake up.

Now David must decide on one of two paths. Abishai says, let me kill him. He waits for David's answer. David has such good reasons to do the human thing, to follow that path: Saul has turned away from God, he is trying to kill David, God has given Saul to him. Also, that's the way the world works. No one would let his enemy go in that circumstance. Finally, David knows that he is the new anointed king. Maybe this is when he is supposed to take over. What about the reasons not to kill Saul. There is only one that he considers. It is the spiritual path. Saul is God's anointed. In this moment, David prefigures the sacraments we receive. God acts in our lives in grace filled ways such that our only response is to say thank you. Perhaps the words of the psalm he will write in the future start to form in his mind: The Lord forgives all your iniquities. He does not repay us what we deserve.

Luke

Now we come to Jesus as he continues his Sermon on the Plain. In the hardest of his teachings, Jesus says be merciful to your enemies. Don't treat them as they deserve. Do good to those who hate you. Yikes, that doesn't sound right! Yikes is a theological term. The Latin is Yik-sum. One would need to meditate upon this passage for a long time, maybe our whole lives.

Jesus keeps telling everyone you have to be like God. Perfect like God. Merciful like God. If you only do what the world expects, you will only get the rewards the world has to offer. And those are fleeting and decompose like our physical bodies. Jesus is not asking for loving feelings and emotions. We don't have to force ourselves to like those who hurt us. Surely God himself in his love, which is measureless and unconditional, cannot like everything he sees in his imperfect children? How can we overcome our impulse to resent injury, our anger and pride? We know that we cannot.

Here is the spiritual perspective. We would not deserve mercy if judged by God's standards. This is so far above us that we will never get it. Being merciful like God means being able to receive mercy that we can never deserve or earn. There is a judgment of God which is inescapable and of that solemn judgment Jesus often spoke. But we are not to make the arrogant assumption that we can take the place of God and do his judging for him. In the Our Father, Jesus taught his disciples that only as they did forgive could they be forgiven.

Even modern psychology has begun to understand that when we judge others, we are likely judging and condemning the same sins in ourselves, the things we are most ashamed of.

Call To Action

Lent is coming up. We can see Lent as a gift from God and something we should be eager to embrace because it invites us on the path of holiness. God is the only one who can give a gift perfectly. It is impossible for us to share in this mercy except by God's grace. Love your enemies: that's someone who doesn't like you and won't return the favour. That means your loving will be with the purity of

God's love. Be good to those who hate you. They won't respond either. Usually we bless someone and there is a returned blessing. Give to everyone who asks of you and don't expect anything in return. No stealing back. Don't just operate the way the world operates. We are to love the way God loves. On the cross, Jesus asks the Father to forgive those who have crucified him. In my physical way of being, I am never going to understand what Jesus said in that terrible moment about his enemies, or what David did with that opportunity against his enemy.

Spend time with this teaching. It will change you. Jesus tells us: Then your reward will be great and children of the most high. This is Christianity. This is our faith. We can't give God back enough to compare with God's love for us. God loves us beyond our expectations, beyond anything we can possibly imagine. In response to God's love, we are to love as God loves, beyond expectations and with a depth beyond imagining. Our path is to slowly learn to love like that.

Key Passages

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 we may carry out in word and deed that which is pleasing to you.*

1 Samuel: *With three thousand chosen men, Saul went to seek David in the wilderness. David and Abishai went into Saul's army by night. Saul lay sleeping with his spear stuck in the ground at his head. Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand today. Now therefore let me pin him to the ground with one stroke of the spear." But David said, "Do not destroy him, for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" So David took the spear that was at Saul's head. No one saw it because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them. Then David stood on top of a hill far away and called aloud to Saul, "Here is the spear, O king! The Lord gave you into my hand today, but I would not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed. As your life was precious today in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord." Then Saul said to David, "Blessed be you, my son David! You will succeed in many things." So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place.*

Psalms: *Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is in me bless his holy name. It is the Lord who forgives all your iniquity. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He does not deal with us according to our sins. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.*

1 Corinthians: *The first man, Adam, became a living being. The last Adam became a life giving spirit. The physical is first, then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, made of dust. The second man is from heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the one of dust, we will also bear the image of the one of heaven.*

Luke: *Jesus said to his disciples: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also. And from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you. And if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you ... do good to those who do good to you ... lend to those who from whom you hope to receive, what credit are these things to you? For even sinners do these things. But love your enemies. do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge and you will not be judged. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

Although I am as bad as the next person in thinking that God needs me to tell God what God ought to do, I do realise that God already knows. So often it is God who

is trying to tell us what we should do, but I fear that we might be too busy to hear. Yes, it is important to pour out our hearts to God, and yes, it is important to pray for the vast number of needs in our world, not least our families and friends, and yes, particular devotions are a valuable part of the Church's 'treasury of prayer'. But if I went to a doctor and spent the whole time telling them all my woes and then got up and left before the doctor could say anything, people would think that I was mad! Yet isn't this the pattern we can fall into with prayer – we only have a one way conversation, we tell God our woes and don't wait for God's answer? Finding Stillness, It is not how you do this that is important, but the fact that we are that we are listening. And that is the great distinction between prayer and mindfulness; so often mindfulness is inward looking and puts oneself at the centre and as the focus. Listening prayer is exactly the opposite of this as it puts God at the centre and we become secondary. A non Jew once offered to become a proselyte if Hillel could teach him the law while he stood on one leg. The rabbi said to him: What you do not like, do not to your neighbour. That is the entire law, and all the rest is commentary.