

Homily For Tuesday of the 7th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1 St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - February 21, 2023

Sirach 2:1-11 "When you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials."

Psalm 37:parts 3-40 "Trust in the Lord and do good, so you will live in the land and enjoy security."

Mark 9:30-37 "Three days later, he will rise again. But they did not understand and were afraid to ask."

From Pancakes to Penance

Introduction

The day before Ash Wednesday is a celebration marking the start of the penitential season of Lent. Traditionally, it is the last day for Christians to indulge before the sober weeks of prayer, fasting and penance that come with Lent. Catholics also prepare for Lent by spiritually removing themselves of sin through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Apparently Shrove Tuesday comes from the old English word shrive, meaning to confess all sins.

The Church sets us up for the sight of the cross of Christ, the Lamb of God who took upon Himself the sins of man and who is the price of our redemption. Every day that brings us closer to Holy Week brings the thought of the passion Christ increasingly closer to our thoughts until it occupies our whole attention. But, from the very beginning of Lent it is present. The whole 'army of Christians' sets out for Easter with the glad certitude of sharing in his resurrection.

Mark

The second of three times that Jesus tells of his betrayal and murder and resurrection, it's greatly distressing to the disciples. Jesus gets them alone so he can explain it to them. It was important to tell them about it before it happened so that, even though it only terrified them at that point, later it would all make sense. We go through the forty days and the events of Holy Week for the same reason, to remind ourselves of the heart of our faith, that Jesus is God, who took on our nature and walk the path of suffering and humiliation for our redemption. It still terrifies us to walk that journey with him.

The Father's purpose for His coming to this world was precisely this: to set us free from sin's slavery and eternal death. Thus, we shall become the sons and daughters of God. Jesus' greatest form of submission, his death on the cross, shows God's measureless Love, which is willing to face the madness and scandal of the Cross.

What made it more difficult for them to understand is that they were talking about who is the greatest among them. What were you arguing about? Jesus asks. He knows. They are like children caught passing notes in class. When God asked: Adam where are you, in the garden, he also knew of their disobedience. And, like Adam, the future apostles are afraid. Imagine being afraid of Jesus.

Sirach

That's why we need Sirach's advice. Trust in God. Cling to him. The writer of the Book of Sirach says to prepare for trials. Those trials are inevitable. You will be tested by the devil and God will allow it as part of the process of refining us and making it holy. It is because gold and silver are tested in fire to get rid of the selfishness. That's the only way. Hopefully, we understand this is not because of being abandoned but so that our love can grow.

We prepare for trial by cling to God and hoping in him. It is like a life buoy thrown to us in the water. Cling to it for dear life. The psalmist says exactly the same thing: "Trust in the Lord and do good so you will live in the land." Remember that for Israel, the land was the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. To be in the land was to have God. We know this story and yet still need another Lent to be reminded of what it all means and how to live it out.

Call To Conversion

Jesus tells them they have to become like children. Those Apostles, who were initially supposed to understand Him but did not quite, will follow in the footsteps of their Lord and their God after the Cross and Resurrection. They will become smaller and smaller every day to let Jesus grow in them and in the world. They will become children of God.

Our Lent is for the same purpose. That's why we need to spend much time hearing our Lord tells us about our lives. Of course, that's the first rule of Lent: prayer. St. Anthony of Padua says: "If you look in murky and turbulent waters, you cannot see the reflection of your face. If you want to see the face of Christ, stop and collect your thoughts in silence, and close the door of your soul to the noise of external things."

Tomorrow we may ask each other: "So, what are you giving up for Lent?" Interestingly, the children love this question. It is a path that allows them to enter into the spirit of Lent. Today, let us enjoy some pancakes, or whatever represents a joyful celebration in preparation for our time of penance and fasting. Let us prepare ourselves to cling to our Lord, walking with him throughout these forty days.

Key Scripture Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord. Should they cry to me in any distress, I will hear them and I will be their Lord forever.*

Collect: *O God, grant, that, by keeping your precepts, we may merit to attain eternal life.*

Sirach: *My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Cling to God so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. Trust in God, and he will help you. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost. You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or forsaken? Or neglected? for the Lord is compassionate and merciful. He forgives sins and saves in time of distress.*

Psalms: *Trust in the Lord, and do good, so you will live in the land and enjoy security. Depart from evil, and do good. For the Lord loves justice. The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their refuge in the time of trouble.*

Mark: *Jesus was teaching his disciples, saying: "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Jesus asked them: "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for they had argued with one another who was the greatest. Jesus said to them: "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and said: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. and the one who sent me.*