

## Homily for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent

December 3-4, 2022

Isaiah 11:1–10  
 Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 12–13, 17  
 Romans 15:4–9  
 Matthew 3:1–12

### *Food that satisfies*

I want to tell you a story about a beautiful swan that alighted one day by the banks of the water in which a crane was wading about seeking snails. For a few moments the crane viewed the swan in wonder and then inquired:

"Where do you come from?"

"I come from heaven!" replied the swan.

"And where is heaven?" asked the crane.

"Heaven!" said the swan, "Heaven! Have you never heard of heaven?" And the beautiful bird went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City. She told of the river of life, pure as crystal, upon whose banks is the tree whose leaves shall be for the healing of the nations. The swan sought to describe in detail without arousing the slightest interest on the part of the crane.

Finally, the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?"

"Snails!" repeated the swan, "No, there are not. Then the crane, as it continued its search along the slimy banks of the pool, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

How easy it is to live on a lower level of existence in search of snails when God wants us to desire the food of heaven. Food that we get a foretaste of in every Eucharist. Food that we are to hunger and thirst for says Jesus because it is the food that will truly satisfy. The food we are to seek with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. How easy it can be to miss the rich fare of the Eucharist, where Jesus enters our very souls, for what seems to be more attractive and immediately satisfying food of this world. Things like entertainment, sports, our phones, distractions that keep us from thinking deeply about our life and its deeper meaning and destiny.

Within our Catholic Tradition, as expressed in the teaching of St. John of the Cross, we have the recipe that will satisfy our true hunger.

He describes the journey towards spiritual fulfillment containing three stages, that also correspond to the three stages of the Mass. The stages are known as:

1. The Purgative Stage, when we ask God to wash away the mud so we can see and long for his table

2. The Illuminative Stage, when we ask God to help us prepare to take our place at his table
3. The Unitive Stage, when we ask God to help us enjoy his heavenly banquet forever

The Gospel reading highlights the *Purgative Stage*. We hear St. John the Baptist call his hearers to repentance,

***Repent. For the kingdom of heaven has come near***

This is the essence of the purgative stage. It is only when grace opens our eyes to the kingdom of heaven that we become aware that I have been satisfied with less than Jesus wants to offer me.

The word for repentance in Greek is *metanoia* and means to change one's mind. It was this kind of repentance the swan invited to crane to consider but he rejected her offer and remained stubbornly set in his own ways. His mind was made up! He wanted nothing but snails.

Christian repentance has both an interior and an exterior dimension. It begins in the mind and heart, where the conviction of sin arises and where the desire to draw closer to God takes place. Although repentance cannot be reduced to a mental act, this change of perspective is essential to the redirection of one's life. The interior attitude thus leads to exterior actions that more fully reflect who we are becoming in Jesus which leads us to the second stage.

When we turn to the reading from Romans, we hear St. Paul describe for us the *Illuminative Stage*:

***For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.***

***May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

As we encounter the encouragement of God, His steadfast love is transforming us into people who live in harmony with others. This is essential to this second stage. There is an increasing experience of unity in our relationship with others, and we discover more deeply the coherence of life because we are glorifying God with a singleness of purpose.

For a glimpse of the *Unitive Stage* or habitual union with God we turn to Isaiah where we have these famous words:

***2The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.  
3His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.***

These verses both describe the Lord Jesus we receive in the Eucharist and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that help us to grow in his like. Those who are attentive to the unitive stage are awakening to insight into the love of God's wisdom and the desire to integrate this into our lives as we are receptive to the infusion of the Holy Spirit.

One of the ways we learn to practise the unitive stage is spending time in Adoration quietly before the Eucharistic Lord. We have Adoration every Friday Morning from 9 AM til noon; and on Saturday mornings from 9-940 AM. I would invite you to come to adoration and take time looking on Jesus as he looks on you.

At every Mass we go through these three stages. With the Confession and Kyrie, we are in the purgative stage. With the Liturgy of the Word, we find ourselves centred in the illuminative stage. When we come to the Consecration; the Words of Institution we are entering into the unitive stage. A union that reaches its fulfillment when we come and receive Jesus, the very bread of heaven, that food alone that can satisfy our deepest hunger.

Let us never settle for a diet of snails but live with hearts and minds set on the food of heaven. May we travel the pathway of purgation, illumination, and union with God so we can echo the words of St Therese of Lisieux who died at 24 in 1897 from tuberculosis and is respected as such an inspirational saint for all who are little flowers – the way she described herself.

*I considered that I was born for glory. . . . After seven years in the religious life, I still am weak and imperfect. I always feel, however, the same bold confidence of becoming a great saint because I don't count on my merits since I have none, but I trust in Him who is Virtue and Holiness. God alone, content with my weak efforts, will raise me to Himself and make me a saint, clothing me in His infinite merits. <sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, Ralph. The Fulfillment of All Desire: A Guidebook to God Based on the Wisdom of the Saints (p. 81). Emmaus Road Publishing. Kindle Edition.