

Living a Life that Matters

Homily for 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

There is something a little bit deflating about Labour Day weekend. For Labour Day weekend signals the psychological end, at least, to summer with its periods of refreshment, and the start again, for many of us, of the more hectic rhythm of life and work at school, university, college, the office or, in the home. So let me ask you: How is your life? Are you giving yourself in living purposefully and so discovering a life that really matters in the busyness of September to June weekly calendar?

There is the story of the little girl who, in the process of growing up, discovered that more than anything else she wanted to be able to mow the lawn. But each season she was told that she was too young. The great day came, however, when her parents decided that, at last, she was old enough to do the task.

She did it with surprising skill and great delight, and having finished admiring her work, she began to cast long, envious glances across the fence at the neighbor's lawn, which also needed cutting.

The neighbor, seeing her interest, said, "Sally, would you like to cut my lawn?" And the little girl enthusiastically said 'yes.'

"Well, let's see...how about \$3.00?" said the neighbor.

The little girl's face fell, and she turned away, shaking her head.

"What's the matter?" asked the neighbor.

"I only have \$2.00," said Sally.

How do we awaken within us that kind of passion and meaning so that we live a life that really matters? What Sally exhibited was a longing and delight to experience satisfaction in doing a job well. Not only that, she was also willing to sacrifice all the money she had in order to accomplish that task.

Our readings for today invite us to realize that it is as we are willing to sacrifice our lives for a cause that we love, that life will be awakened within us so that we can have lives of meaning, thereby living a life that really matters.

Jeremiah calls us to sacrifice, while Paul in Romans invites us to be conformed to that sacrifice which in the Gospel Jesus then challenges each of us emulate his example.

Jeremiah is of all the prophets the one we would call reluctant. He knew that from his birth God had called him. He understood that there was the One above, him, beyond him who was also beside him and within him. In today's reading he speaks of God's call in language suggesting God had duped him into a relationship where he was propositioned under false pretences:

***O LORD, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.***

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary “enticed” means:

to attract artfully or adroitly or by arousing hope or desire

Do you identify with Jeremiah? Perhaps like Jeremiah and Sally you at one time were caught up in the wonder of life, even simple things like mowing the lawn. But then with the passing of time you experienced disappointment and unfulfilled dreams; like Jeremiah you wondered, was I deceived? Or maybe as Sally grows older the wonder at cutting grass diminishes and becomes nothing more than a chore. What about you? Is yours a life that is wonder-full or is it a burden to carry that weighs down your soul?

Now when I say wonder-full I do not mean what it might mean to have a winning lottery ticket. Not that kind of wonderful. No I mean wonder-full in the biblical sense of the word. This is something that even in the midst of his feeling slighted by God Jeremiah is able to express. Even though when he proclaims the message and is spurned by the people and made a cause of derision, even though he says: “For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long”, still there is wonder in his words:

***If I say, “I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,”
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.***

There is longing in Jeremiah’s soul that is purposeful because he knows that God has called him to live sacrificially. He knows that he is to live for God. For Jeremiah this means he has to fulfill the vocation to which God had called him, that is to be a prophet.

Now you and I are not called to the prophetic office that was Jeremiah’s. Ours might be the calling of student, homemaker, professional, married or single. We may be a labourer, merchant, volunteer and so on. Like Jeremiah we may have faced opposition and even ridicule. But like Jeremiah we are also to rediscover that in the call of God is a voice more substantive than the voices that would oppose us and try to discourage us.

We learn to hear this call again and be renewed to a life that matters when we understand that we are not to be conformed to the values of this world but to the purposes of God. Listen again how Paul expresses this in Romans:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Now here is the key, the only body you have to present to God is your body. The only life you have is your life and all that this means for you. When we are able to more fully accept this we are able to discover the deeper purpose of our lives. On the Jewish altar the sacrifice offered was killed. We on the other hand are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. When we are able to more intentionally do this we find in the circumstances of our daily lives the opportunity to serve God. This happens as we live not conformed to the world but allowing our lives to be transformed by God. I like the way this translation puts it:

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.

One of the ways the world wants to squeeze us into its mould is by instilling within us the mortal sins of covetousness and envy. We are constantly enticed to want the newest and most innovative whatever it may be! We are seduced to believing that Sally the grass really is greener on the other side..... Only if you have a sprinkler system this summer.

Here is the point. It is as we open ourselves up to seeing our lives from the perspective of Jesus that we will discover that we are to have in mind the things of God, not the things of men. For Jesus challenges us not to emulate the world but him.

It has been said that "the problem with the Christian life is that it's so daily."

It's true. Following Jesus is a lifestyle that builds on past lessons and decisions, but it also depends on our dedication day by day. We cannot live off yesterday's virtues, last week's prayers, or the Bible stories we heard when we were children.

Each new day is both a challenge and an opportunity. Our faith will be challenged, and we can use that challenge as an opportunity to grow in our relationship with God. Jesus Himself said that those who wanted to be His disciples were expected to be in a continual attitude of self-denial and obedience to Him. Here's how the Lord put it in today's Gospel:

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

As each day unfolds, we must pause and remind ourselves that this is a day dedicated to God, that it is to be used for His glory, and that it is best lived with a continual recollection of what Jesus did for us on the cross and how he makes the cross present in the Eucharist.

***The Christian life is more than just
A prayer of faith made in the past;
It's dedicating every day
To live for Christ and what will last.***

Dedication to Christ is not just a one-time choice, it's a daily challenge. Those who are choosing to live with this kind of intentionality are cultivating a life that really matters because like Jeremiah we are responding to that call to sacrifice, with Paul we hear the invitation to conformed to that sacrifice which the Lord Jesus then challenges each of us emulate his example.

May such a perspective allow us to approach Labour Day with an awareness that life is indeed wonder-full when it is Christ-filled.