

## *His Story*

Homily for 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

September 23, 2018

Once upon a time there was a peasant woman and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So, her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell God; “She once pulled up an onion in her garden,” said he, “and gave it to a beggar woman.” And God answered: “You take that onion then, hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion brakes, then the woman must stay where she is.”

The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. “Come,” said he, “catch hold and I’ll pull you out.” He began cautiously pulling her out. He had just pulled her right out, when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and she began kicking them. “I’m to be pulled out, not you. It’s my onion, not yours.” As soon as she said that, the onion broke. And the woman fell into the lake and she is burning there to this day. So, the angel wept and went away.<sup>1</sup>

This story, taken from *The Brothers Karamazov* asks an important question. Do we live life that St Augustine termed: *Incurvatus in se*, that is a life curved inward on oneself; or are we learning to live a life turn outwards toward God and others?

The peasant woman’s life was wicked because she was consumed by herself, a condition the twentieth century Swiss Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar termed the “ego drama”. This way of understanding life is to conclude, like the woman in our story, life is about me, my wants, my ambitions, my desires. What is the opposite of the ego drama? It is the “theo drama”, says von Balthasar. People learning to live according to this drama are discovering my life finds its true meaning when it is turned outwards toward God and others. This is the story God is writing, and he wants us to be part of His Story.

We see the tension between the “ego drama” and “theo drama” in today’s Gospel. The disciples encapsulate the self-centred story when Mark tells us, in response to Jesus’ question about their traveling argument:

***But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.***

Here is the desire at the heart of so many restless and self-centred souls. My life is not only about me, but I want to be singled out as the greatest. Such hubris can best be described as hell, that state inhabited by those who’ve received academy awards for their little ego dramas.

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<sup>1</sup> Charity: Gary A. Anderson Yale University Press: Page 1

In his novel, *The Great Divorce* C.S. Lewis contrasts heaven and hell. He images hell as a large, gray city, where it is always rainy and constantly in that stage of twilight just as the lights are being turned on. The narrator walks through empty streets lined with dingy boarding houses, small tobacco shops, windowless warehouses, and “bookshops of the sort that sell *The Works of Aristotle*”. The narrator joins a queue at a bus stop and boards a bus that takes him to the outskirts of heaven. We don’t see hell again, but we learn more about it as the story continues. The citizens of the city are quarrelsome—fights break out, even on the bus, and we are told that the streets are empty as residents keep moving further away from each other because they can’t stop quarreling with neighbors. We also learn that the city is unsubstantial. One can construct a house or come by various commodities just by thinking them, but the houses can’t keep out rain or intruders and the commodities don’t satisfy needs. Most striking is the fact that, though the gray city seems huge, it actually is tiny—“nearly Nothing”. “All Hell is smaller than one pebble of the heavenly world”.<sup>2</sup>

The narrator and the other bus passengers are not fit to enter Heaven yet. The brightness of Heaven renders them transparent ghosts because of how imperfect they are to enter Heaven. The reader is told:

***“One could attend to them or ignore them at will as you do with the dirt on a window pane. I noticed that the grass did not bend under their feet: even the dew drops were not disturbed. They are still in the same form as they ever were, but the glory of heaven renders their definition of form incomplete. It was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solidier than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison.***

***(Lewis Chapter 3)***

The only way we will become substantive is to enter into heaven is to leave the ego drama behind and learn the way to true humility, the central theme of the “theo drama”, as expressed by Jesus, when in today’s Gospel he says:

***“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”*<sup>36</sup> *Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,*<sup>37</sup> ***“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”*****

It is as we learn this way of noticing the little things, the little ones, and accepting that we too are little but have a part to play in Jesus’ great story that we find true meaning, purpose and lasting value.

However, this is hard for us influenced by sin where life curved in on itself is a more natural orientation than to live turned outward to God and others. St. James understands this and speaks with a pastoral care and honesty in today’s second reading. Listen to his description of the ego drama:

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cslewis.com/heaven-and-hell-as-idea-and-image-in-c-s-lewis/>

***<sup>16</sup> For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind... Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts.***

There is the Hell of C.S Lewis' Great Divorce and the hell many people are living in each day. The only way we can leave this grey wasteland is by cultivating the perspective of the "theo drama". Listen to how St. James describes it:

***But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.***

Now there is a picture of heaven come down to earth. For you see beloved, in this life we are all auditioning for the Great Show of heaven or the side show of hell, where our roles will be eternal. What God's wants is to cast each of us in that drama where the virtues of genuineness, mercy and transparency are being rehearsed throughout our earthly lives. When we purposefully choose the "theo drama" hear what the consequence is:

***<sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.***

This is the life Jesus inspires us to live and so discover true purpose and freedom and find our place in making His Story with the author of life, Jesus Christ.