

Homily for Wednesday in the Second Week of Easter

Acts 5:17–26

Psalm 34:2–9

John 3:16

John 3:16–21

There is a story that comes out of the Bedouin culture. "Bedouin" is the Aramaic name for "desert dwellers." These people live much as the characters of the Old Testament did. During a heated argument, according to this story, a young Bedouin struck and killed a friend of his. Knowing the ancient, inflexible customs of his people, the young man fled, running across the desert under the cover of darkness, seeking safety.

He went to the black tent of the tribal chief in order to seek his protection. The old chief took the young Arab in. The chief assured him that he would be safe until the matter could be settled legally.

The next day, the young man's pursuers arrived, demanding the murderer be turned over to them. They would see that justice would prevail in their own way. "But I have given my word," protested the chief.

"But you don't know whom he killed!" they countered.

"I have given my word," the chief repeated.

"He killed your son!" one of them blurted out. The chief was deeply and visibly shaken with his news. He stood speechless with his head bowed for a long time. The accused and the accusers as well as curious onlookers waited breathlessly. What would happen to the young man? Finally the old man raised his head. "Then he shall become my son," he informed them, "and everything I have will one day be his."

The young man certainly didn't deserve such generosity. And that, of course, is the point. Love in its purest form is beyond comprehension. No one can merit it. It is freely given. It is agape, the love of God. Look to the cross. At the cross we encounter love in its purest form.

This love finds particular expression in the Gospel of John. John shows us that Jesus is born into enemy territory, described by John as "the world." In John the term "world" has a technical character to it. The world represents humanity as alienated from God by sin and death. But it is this world that is the arena and the object of God's salvation, much like the Bedouin youth.

The world that has caused the heart of the father such pain, is now the object of his gracious and redemptive love. So when we hear that most famous of verses: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life", it is helpful to keep in mind that God's love is extended to the world at opposition with God, the world that has caused him so much pain.

Here is the greatest expression of the Grace of God. What is required of every human being, one person at a time, is to choose to come into the light-filled grace of God. For as Jesus so clearly states:

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus' desire is to always draw the world to himself. And yet he is also able to admit there will be those who, so to speak, will not come under his mercy, because they are unwilling to admit their wrong doing. When this happens people remain outside of the dwelling of grace because people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. It is as we come to the one who is the source of grace that we can experience ever more fully the liberty that belongs to those who have been adopted as sons and daughters of our merciful Father.

But such grace requires of us the courage to see ourselves rightly in relation to our heavenly Father much like Dennis the Menace in relation to Mrs. Wilson. In an old Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis and his little friend Joey are leaving Mrs. Wilson's house, their hands full of cookies. Joey says, "I wonder what we did to deserve this." Dennis answers, "Look, Joey. Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice, but because she's nice."

Not only is our heavenly Father nice, even more he is merciful. When we, like the Bedouin youth come under his roof, we are changed from the inside out. No longer is it the world that primarily defines and shapes our character. Now it is God. Jesus says as much at the end of the Gospel reading for today:

But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

May such love inspire us every day to remember that while we live in the world, we do not belong to the world. We are children of the Father who relates to us with the grace emanating every day from the Cross and made present to us in the sacraments. May we allow him to treat us as he desires, those who because of the death of his son Jesus are now the object of his love. Bedouin wanderers in need of a home and so in need of mercy.