

Homily for the Saturday of the 19th Week in Ordinary Time

There is a wonderful device that all of us have in our homes that reveals to us the solution to all of the problems we have in life. Some of you may think I am talking about the Bible, but I am not. While the Bible does reveal to us the spiritual truths that will make our lives whole, there is another more fundamental device that shows us who it is who can solve all of the problems we face every day. The answer is simple. It is a mirror. If you gaze into it, you will have the answer to all of the problems you will ever face in life. You may think it strange to suggest to you that what you see in a mirror is the answer to all of the problems you will ever face. Yet, what I am doing, I believe, is illustrating the fundamental truth which God is trying to communicate through the prophet Ezekiel in our text this morning.

The people of Judah themselves to be detainees, “guests” who couldn’t go home, exiles in a strange land. The armies of Babylonia had Israel to whom this text originally was addressed foun swept over their country and led them away into captivity.

Now they were beginning to wonder who was responsible for their being where they were. They couldn’t see that they themselves had much to do with it because it had happened so quickly. They really didn’t have time to prepare for what was happening or even defend themselves adequately. Then it dawned on them. The prophets had warned their parents that this would happen, but their parents had not taken heed of what the prophets had said. They found a way of saying that which their captors didn’t really understand, but which they themselves understood very well. “The parents (our parents) ate the sour grapes,” they said, “But the children (that’s us) got the sour taste (it’s sour too -- we hate this place).” Woe is us. There isn’t anything we can do about it now.

And a sorry lot they were. As long as they sat around and felt sorry for themselves and blamed it all on their parents, their situation became even more helpless. There was no one who could help them because the people who were responsible for their being in this strange land were all dead. If they would only have had a mirror, maybe they would have seen what a great mistake they were making. But they had something just about as good -- maybe even better. They had Ezekiel the prophet who could deliver God’s message. Their parents may have all been dead, but God was still sending his prophets to deliver his message

There was a mistaken notion that children are punished for the sins of their parents, as common in our day as it was in Ezekiel’s. However, each individual is responsible only for his own transgressions. And if the just man sin or the sinner be converted, neither the former’s good deeds nor the latter’s evil actions will be remembered. Ezekiel invites all to true repentance, assuring them of the Lord’s mercy. God is more eager to pardon than to punish. This teaching on personal accountability and divine mercy was particularly necessary when national responsibility

and divine justice led to despair. Although Ezekiel was suffering unjust exile, he of all the prophets stresses the responsibility of every man answering for his own faults.

The proverb "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (Ezekiel 18:2) claims self-righteously that this generation is being punished for the sins of their forebears, implying that God is unjust. But, Ezekiel says that whoever observes God's commandments is just and will not die prematurely. God's mercy to the repentant sinner and the need of perseverance in the practice of justice complete his teaching. He then gives an urgent invitation to conversion, as John the Baptist will do later on.

Saint Ambrose speaks of three kinds of death: the death of sin, the mystical death of Baptism, and physical death. Those who are learning to receive the Kingdom of Heaven like little children know that while our family of origin may have been fraught with sin and disordered relationships, our baptism declares that we are children of another family. Through the mystical death in baptism we are joined to our blessed Lady and Spiritual mother Mary and to her beloved Son Jesus. It is this family, our family of destiny that defines us now. This allows us to look ourselves in the mirror and say yes to Ezekiel. God does not require anyone to die because of sin. Rather he invites us into his family through the death of baptism so with David we can pray:

Create a clean heart in me O God.