

*Galilee, our True Home*

Homily for Holy Saturday

Easter Vigil, April 19, 2019

Five years ago next Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup> John Paul II was Canonized. The French writer André Frossard said of St John Paul II:

*“This Pope does not come from Poland. He comes from Galilee.”*

One event in his papacy embodied this truth in a vivid way. Back on May 13<sup>th</sup> 1981 the Turkish gun man Ali Agca attempted to assassinate the Holy Father as he greeted the crowds in St. Peter’s Square late that afternoon. On December 27<sup>th</sup> 1983 the Pope then went to celebrate Mass in the Rebibbia Prison and to meet personally with Ali Agca where he forgave him for what he had done two and a half years earlier. Sadly it seems that Agca was not able to receive into his heart the meaning of this forgiveness. George Weigel who wrote John Paul II’s authorized English biography, *Witness to Hope* wrote of this encounter:

***“Agca, for his part, described the Vatican as the “greatest of criminals” and said that the Church had offered him a huge sum of money and a cardinal’s red hat if he converted to Catholicism.”***

I use this story as a clear depiction of how St John Paul was a Pope, who because he was “from Galilee” so embodied in his life the Easter Gospel. For it is clear in reading the Easter Gospels that two themes reoccur. The first is that Jesus shows the apostles his wounds and secondly he declares to them forgiveness in the word “Peace” or “Shalom”.

The wounds of Jesus are shown for a very clear and important reason. He wants his disciples and us to know what sin has done. Jesus went to the Cross because the world resisted him. It is important to remember that Jesus did not just die, he was put to death. And practically everyone around him resisted him and contributed to his death. Here was God’s own self in human form. Therefore the resistance to him is the surest sign of our sin. The surest indication of our spiritual dysfunction. Nobody after the cross can say “you’re okay and I’m okay.” We know from the very wounds of Jesus that we are off kilter. They mirror back to us our need for grace.

But then comes that word, that haunting word spoken from the lips of Jesus and therefore spoken from the lips of God himself. “Shalom, Peace.” Our English translation barely captures the range of its meaning. Shalom in Hebrew intends something like complete flourishing, life, joy, goodness and fulfillment. Shalom represents everything Yahweh wanted for his people from the beginning. It is what the entire biblical revelation is meant to convey. And it is because of this understanding that we have five readings from the Old Testament at the Easter Vigil. We are to understand the culmination of this Shalom is declared by the empty tomb of Easter. What the

prophets and the patriarchs wanted the people to experience, what the Ten Commandments and all the covenants were about is Shalom.

What is the Easter Message? Even though we are sinners and the wounds of Christ prove it, even though we are hopeless in our hatred and our stupidity, and the wounds of Christ prove it. Even though we had gone and would still go today to the limits of killing God's own son, God still loves us. God still forgives us. That is why we know in the words of Romans 8 "that nothing can separate us from the love of God." We hear in the Shalom of the risen Jesus that any and every sin can be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Spirit. What is this sin? It is simply the refusal to accept this forgiveness. It is the seemingly hardened attitude of the likes of Ali Agca, who after a personal audience with the Pope, still remained embittered and untrusting. Therefore the sin against the Holy Spirit is the stubborn refusal to accept this infinitely gracious forgiveness of God. It is to reject the Good News of Easter.

But when we do see the connection between the wounds and forgiveness this carries a spiritual power that is transformative in the souls of those who receive this Easter Good News. This is news that we celebrate especially in the lives of Kathryn DeKolver, Victoria Hawke-Petit, Melissa Neumann, Beth Chury, Candice Webb, Sueanne Fong, who will be baptized this evening. And for Kate Chury, Cecillia Hohner, and Ann Hordyski, will be Confirmed along with our Elect!

The nine of you along with us join Pope St. John Paul II who clearly understood this that he was the Pope who came from Galilee, not only Poland. His whole papacy was an expression of how the wounds of sin inflicted by the atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century could not silence the Resurrection declaration of Shalom-Peace.

There was, many centuries earlier, another man, who although originally from Tarsus, and was vehemently opposed to the Galilean Carpenter came to see that all of those who come under his grace are to then find their own identity in his wounds and forgiveness.

He puts this so succinctly in Romans 6. There Paul says that all of our true homes is Galilee because it is the man Jesus who shapes our true and eternal identity and destiny. Repeatedly in this reading there is the juxtaposition between the death and wounds of Jesus and the resurrection and shalom of Jesus. Listen again to part of it.

***For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus***

We are no longer enslaved by sin when we allow the Shalom of the Lord Jesus to speak into our hearts.

I want to end by presenting to you the North Rose Window of Notre Dame. Thankfully this window was saved on Monday. Before showing you the window, here is a picture of the ruined Cathedral with the Cross rising above the rubble that I present to you. Here is a representation of how devastating life in this world can be but this wound of the Cathedral points to the Shalom of the Rose Window.

Let me explain how the Window represents the Shalom of Jesus: Around the central figures of Christ and his mother are eight small circles. Then on the next major row we find sixteen circular images and on the next twice sixteen, or thirty-two, images, and then finally another row of thirty-two. If we add thirty-two, thirty-two, sixteen, and eight, we arrive at eighty-eight. In a word, the entire window is an artistic meditation on the number eight. The number eight is a symbol of eternity, since it stands immediately outside of seven, which evokes the seven days of the week, or the completed cycle of time.

As the Catechism teaches in paragraph 1166:

***“The day of Christ’s Resurrection is both the first day of the week, the memorial of the first day of creation, and the “eighth day,” on which Christ after his “rest” on the great sabbath inaugurates the “day that the Lord has made,” the “day that knows no evening.”***

Notre Dame is for us this week a living witness to the Resurrection for amidst her wounds she witnesses to the hope that embodied the papacy of St. John Paul II. It is the hope we celebrate in the baptisms of these six women and confirmation of these nine women.

Christ is Risen!!! May we share in that hope and radiate the peace of Jesus with the confidence of the Notre Dame North Window.