

Homily for January 4, 2020

In John Chapter 8 Jesus nails our human predicament which in turn explains why he needed to be nailed to the Cross.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. 35 The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. 36 So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

The Bible teaches that you and I are powerless to break free from the devil and the bondage of our own weaknesses because of sin. This predicament entangles everyone.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church picking up on this theme notes:

By freeing some individuals from the earthly evils of hunger, injustice, illness, and death, Jesus performed messianic signs. Nevertheless, he did not come to abolish all evils here below, but to free people from the gravest slavery, sin, which thwarts them in their vocation as God’s sons and daughters and causes all forms of human bondage. (549)¹

It is this theme that St. John in today’s epistle is emphasizing. Notice how he begins:

Little children, let no one deceive you

Repeatedly in this epistle John addresses his readers as little children. This is instructive, reminding us that just as children need the protective care of their parents, we need the protective care of our heavenly Father, big brother Jesus and Mother Mary. One of the things that we need to be most protected from is the deception that is in the world, which is under the domain of the devil.

Constantly the world wants to celebrate vice and sin and diminish or even reject outright our need for Jesus Christ. John wants us to be aware that this is the greatest deception faced by every generation of believers. He then lays out in very clear terms the tension at play in the soul of every human being:

He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Here is the human predicament expressed with precision and the explanation as to why Jesus had to be nailed to the Cross. The devil keeps people in the vice of sin, whereby they turn away from God and come under the power of the evil one. Such people are slaves. Contrast that with what John says about those who come under the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ. They become sons and daughters of God our Father. So great is the distinction that John uses language that can lead us to think, that to be a follower of Jesus means to be sinless.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed., p. 140). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

9 Any one born of God does not commit sin; for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. 10 By this it may be seen who the children of God are, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.

The point is not that sinless perfection is required to call oneself a Christian, but that true believers refuse to lead lives dominated by sin. Instead, they strive to break free from godless habits, and, whenever necessary, they seek God's mercy through confession.

May we be inspired to keep before us the inspired teaching of St. John so that in the words of today's Collect:

***just as Jesus was pleased to share our bodily form
through the childbearing of the Virgin Mary,
so we, too, may one day merit
to become companions in his kingdom of grace.²***

What a lovely way to think of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, a companion in his kingdom of grace. May we discover the great gift as sharing together in this companionship here at St. Peter's in the coming year and decade.

² [*The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II.*](#) (2011). (Third Typical Edition, p. 200). Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.