

Homily for May 12, 2017

For those at Mass yesterday morning we were considering the first part of St Paul's first homily preached at Antioch. In my homily we concentrated on David being a Man after God's own heart. Today we see the one described who fully represents the Man after God's own heart, the Lord Jesus Christ.

St Paul, in agreement with the rest of the New Testament witness show us that Jesus fulfills the prophetic witness that hundreds of years earlier had been foretold through Moses in Deuteronomy:

When someone is convicted of a crime punishable by death and is executed, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his corpse must not remain all night upon a tree; you shall bury him that same day, for anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse.

Three times there is reference to "a tree"

St Paul probably has this verse in mind when he declares:

Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. 29 When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Notice how Paul phrases this: "When they had carried out everything that was written about him they took him down from the tree. Now the article has changed from the indefinite in Deuteronomy, 'a tree', to the definite article in Paul, 'the tree'. The Cross is that tree which will overcome the curse resulting from Adam and Eve eating from that other Tree, the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

Paul's reference to Jesus being taken down from the tree brings into focus the essence of what the Cross means. In 2 Corinthians we have the clearest one sentence statement as to the Cross' significance:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.¹

Consider this, Jesus who was without sin took into himself the sin of the world. Think of what it is liked to be cursed, to be insulted, to have your character defamed so that in your soul and body you feel diminished and worthless. Think of the curse of Auschwitz, the curse of aborturaries, the curses that have marked the lives of so many. On the tree of the Cross Jesus experience the fullest manifestation of such cursing. Take what we have known personally and now think of Jesus experiencing the sin or the curse of the world.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5L21

When people act in this way, expressing cruelty and injustice it appears from a human perspective that the world is unhinged and directionless. Paul wants us to understand that this is never the case. When all hell is breaking loose by the collusion of the Jewish leadership with Pilate and Rome, God's most exacting work of salvation is being fulfilled. Though from a purely human perspective the Cross seems meaningless, from the perspective of the Christian it is infused with meaning.

This is why Paul says:

Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him.

So, in that act which seems most senseless, the condemnation of God, the purposes of God were being fulfilled as Jesus took into himself the curse of the world as he died on the tree.

This weekend we are celebrating the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the three children Francisco, his sister Jacinta their cousin Lúcia. They were from Aljustrel, a small hamlet near Fátima, Portugal.

Like Paul's teaching in Acts, the Fatima apparitions help us to remember that even movements as diabolical as Soviet Communism and German National Socialism and their resulting madness, they were foreshadowed by our Lady during the six months she visited Fatima. And even something as horrific as the assassination attempt on St. John Paul II on May 13th 1981 was foretold at Fatima decades earlier. The world only learned of the prophetic words foretelling the attempt on the Holy Father's life when the Fatima Secret was revealed in the Year 2000.

May this 100th Anniversary of Fatima help instill within us the confidence that Jesus imparted to the Apostles in the Upper Room when he said:

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.

Remember such words were spoken just before the events of Good Friday would unfold and Jesus would go to the Tree.

The unfolding of History is His Story. Paul and Fatima make so clear what we prayed at the beginning of today's Collect:

"O God, author of our freedom and our salvation"

Life is infused with meaning because there is one behind its unfolding, there is an author. May we during this Fatima Weekend be inspired to a deeper confidence and trust in the author as our stories continue to be written day by day.