

Homily for May 26th 2020

The Greatest Gift

I think we find true interior freedom when we discover that our life is a gift. At the most fundamental level we realize this to be so; the evidence - our birth was not our choice. We had no say in the fact that well, we are here.

However as the Lord said to St. Catherine of Sienna, “I have created you without you, but I will not save you without you”, so he says to us.

When we come to a deeper realization of how the Lord invites us to cooperate with him in our salvation then we discover life is a gift that is relational. It is first and foremost about our relationship with the Blessed Trinity. We know this to be fundamental to discovering life’s meaning because Jesus says so in today’s Gospel:

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ¹

To know the only true God is the greatest gift in life because in knowing God we better come to know ourselves and so cooperate with the Lord in our salvation. But here is the thing, we cannot know this to be where we discover life’s most important gift apart from Jesus Christ.

In his High Priestly prayer, which we will hear through to Thursday’s Mass, Jesus show us that to know him is the greatest gift of all. Eleven times in the eleven verses of today’s reading a form of the verb “to give” is expressed in Jesus’ prayer. Clearly the theme of “gift” is central to this passage.

Jesus prays with thanksgiving to the Father for those whom the Father had given to him. This is first of all the Apostles, for whom he is directly praying, but as we will hear on Thursday, the last six verses of the prayer, focus on those who will believe because of the Apostolic teaching that will be passed on to all subsequent generations. Therefore that includes you and me. Do you know that because of the grace given you in baptism you are a gift given to Jesus by the Father?

Jesus then speaks of the work the Father had given him to do, which later that night, for this prayer is prayed on Holy Thursday, Jesus would accomplish as he sets his face to the Cross. On the Cross he will do the greatest work of all, to take into himself the Sin of the World.

What is fundamental to that sin? We believe that we can make sense life without God, and can indeed take his place, as the serpent so convincingly tempted our ancestors in the Garden of Eden.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:3). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

***You will be like God, knowing good and evil*²**

But such deception only leads to our ruin and life rather than being seen as a gift is perceived as a burden to be resented as the rest of Genesis 3 clearly illustrates.

Remember Jesus prayed it is in knowing the only true God that we discover the eternal life, which gives meaning to why we are here.

Having prayed to the Father in thanksgiving for the gift of those who are his disciples, looking to the work of the Cross, Jesus then goes on to pray to the Father about the words he has given to the Apostles:

***Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.*³**

Here is the heart of the matter. The words of Jesus are an expression of the one who is the Word of whom John writes in the first chapter of his Gospel:

***And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*⁴**

Jesus words are full of grace; this means they are words infused with patience and love and they are always invitational. They are also full of truth that when incorporated in our lives bring us to the interior freedom of which I spoke at the beginning of the homily. In John 8 Jesus says:

***If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*⁵**

That's it. To continue in his word will help us to see why we are here because Jesus speaks the words of truth. Words that free us as we come to cooperate more with the one that created us, so that by his grace and our relationship to Jesus we will be saved by him.

I pray that on this day you will realize the one whose relationship with you matters most, the Lord Jesus and thereby discover more fully that you are a gift to Jesus, as his death and words are the greatest gift you can receive.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Ge 3:5). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Jn 17:7–8). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Jn 1:14). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Jn 8:31–32). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.