

Time is greater than space

Homily for April 7, 2022

Thursday of Lent 5

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* which Pope Francis released in 2013 he wrote about the relationship between time and space and stated that time is greater than space. Before I quote the Holy Father, let me give an example of this from the kitchen.

I love making pizza on Mondays. I gather together my ingredients early in the morning to make the dough. I measure out 1.5 cups warm water, 2 teaspoons of salt and .5 teaspoons of yeast. I mix these together and then add 500 grams of pizza flour. Blending these together with my spoon I let the dough sit for 20 minutes. Then removing the dough from the bowl I knead these simple ingredients, put them into a bowl, top with flour, seal the bowl and wait for 12 hours for the dough to rise. It takes that much time for that half teaspoon of yeast to influence the flour, water and salt, which proportionately are in greater quantity than the yeast. Do you see how in my kitchen illustration time is greater than space? Patience is needed for the dough to become malleable so that it can be formed into that delicious crust that is then topped with a variety of cheeses, meat and vegetables that make pizza night something the Gibsons always look forward to.

Okay so let me now quote Pope Francis who says that time is greater than space in a more philosophical way:

A constant tension exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. Broadly speaking, “time” has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of enclosure. Here we see a first principle for progress in building a people: time is greater than space. This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results.¹

Now I know that is a mouthful. Let me explain it by going back to my pizza. It takes time for the dough to rise. If I tried to bake it prematurely there would not have been enough time for the yeast to fill the space of the other ingredients and that would have been a waste of all those toppings. Pope Francis says this is what it is like in our lives as well. The growth of the life of Jesus in each one of us, takes time. The work that seeks to bring about healing in relationships, the work of understanding ourselves so that we can become integrated and whole, is the work of a lifetime.

¹ Francis, Pope. *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* (p. 111). Pauline Books and Media. Kindle Edition.

It is this very theme that is at the heart of our first reading from Genesis 17 when the Lord says to Abram (this name means “exalted father”).

I am God almighty, walk before me and be blameless. I will make my covenant between me and you, and make you exceedingly numerous.

Here the Lord is inviting Abram to cooperate with the work of grace in his life, much like the yeast cooperating with the other pizza ingredients. And what does the Lord say? Time is greater than space, for I will make you numerous. He then goes to change Abram’s name from “Exalted Father” to Abraham ‘ the Father of a multitude’ and declares:

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.

Now would Abraham see any of this? No he wouldn’t because he inhabited a limited space in time. But when we discover time is greater than space we can inhabit the limited space that is our present moment, with the assurance that the God who spoke to Abraham is the Jesus who in today’s Gospel says, “so to speak”, the dough has now risen. Abraham longed to see my day – and says Jesus he does see it and is glad.

My beloved brothers and sisters to live with the perspective that time is greater than space frees us from being fretful about immediate results, allowing us to affirm with today’s psalmist:

God is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations.

By cultivating this perspective we are in the words of today’s collect aware that God looks kindly on those who place their hope in his mercy; so that cleansed from the stain of sin we can today persevere in holy living knowing that with time we will be made full heirs of the same promise God made to Abraham.