

***Like the Honeycomb***

Homily for September 23, 2021

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

There are three kinds of givers: the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything from the flint, you must hammer it. Yet, all you get are chips and sparks. The flint gives nothing away if it can help it, and even then only with a great display. To get anything from the sponge, you must squeeze it. It readily yields to pressure and the more it is pressed, the more it gives. Still, one has to squeeze it. To get anything from the honeycomb, however, one must only take what freely flows from it. It gives its sweetness generously, dripping on all without pressure, without begging or badgering. The honeycomb is a renewable resource. Unlike the flint or the sponge, the honeycomb is connected to life; it is the product of the ongoing work and creative energy of bees.

Today the Church celebrates a man who gave like the honeycomb. Francesco Forgione (1887-1968) was born in the Italian village of Pietrelcina. He entered the Capuchin Friars at the age of 16, taking the name Pio (pious) and was ordained in 1910. A stigmatic, he lived more than 50 years at the friary of San Giovanni Rotondo, devoted to a life of ministry through sacramental reconciliation, and the celebration of the Eucharist, and helping countless people who sought his counsel. Pope St Paul VI said of him:

***Look what fame he had, what a worldwide following gathered around him. But why? Perhaps because he was a philosopher? Because he was wise? Because he had resources at his disposal? No, it was because he said Mass humbly, heard confessions from dawn to dusk, and was one who bore the wounds of our Lord. He was a man of prayer and suffering.***

St Padre Pio was a man who gave like the honeycomb, his heart filled with the sweet love of Jesus. However it was a heart and life formed by an intense battle with the forces of evil, where the devil and his demons repeatedly tried to defeat him. However in the end they were defeated by his faithful trust in Jesus as he lived his priesthood each day by choosing to love.

How different a man St Padre Pio was from Herod, in our Gospel reading. Upon hearing about Jesus, Herod “was greatly perplexed.” In the Gospel of Mark, Herod even said that Jesus “is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up” (Mark 6:16). Herod, as worldly as he was, could not fully disavow his attraction to the sacred. Before beheading John, “Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man... when he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him” (Mark 6:20). Now his fascination with the saintly John and his guilty conscience (for having beheaded John) made Herod uneasy when hearing about Jesus. While people may try to ignore their religious and moral sense and live a hedonistic lifestyle, the voice of conscience calling man back to goodness and truth is very resilient. This is so because God made us in his image and likeness.

But sadly we can choose to in the end ignore this call. This as the case with Herod. His desire to see Jesus would be fulfilled on Good Friday, when Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, who was in Jerusalem that day. St Luke describes the encounter this way:

*When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. <sup>9</sup> He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. <sup>1</sup>*

On seeing Jesus Herod's heart became more like flint and less like the honeycomb. As can so often happen he was influenced by those around him who voiced their disdain for Jesus and Herod preferred their company and Pilate's to that of Jesus.

In each of our lives, we too are invited into a deepening life of grace, so that it is not the embittered hardness of the world informing and forming us, but the sweet grace of Jesus that like the honey bee imparts its nectar into our souls so we can live generous lives because we are connected to the source of love, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Lk 23:8–12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.