

Homily For Tuesday of the Third Week of Advent - Year II

St Peter's 8:30 AM/7:00 PM Masses - Dec 14, 2021

Zephaniah 3:1-2,9-13 "On that day, you shall not be put to shame because of your rebellious deeds."

Psalms 34:1-22 "Let the humble hear and be glad. He is near to the crushed in spirit."

Matt. 21:28-32 "Tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."

Will You ... Won't You

Introduction

All these months after the Olympics in Japan last summer, it still amazes me how many of the successful athletes, interviewed by various media, invariably came to a point in their comments when they said: I'm proud of what I have accomplished. I am proud of what I have overcome. I am proud of myself. Athlete after athlete. They all seemed like nice people, but somehow pride of self had taken the place of appreciation for those who had made their accomplishments possible.

But then I remember a time when I was about 14. I was with my dad and a business associate. For some reason I was telling them how good I was at my math studies. When the other man said I shouldn't brag, I came back with, well it's not bragging if it's true. I didn't know why they both laughed, but even now I am embarrassed remembering it.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah the prophet lamented over the arrogance of his people. Their pride had gone so far as to lead first to idolatry, then to injustice, then to outright disobedience. The people of God had gotten to the point where they accepted no correction. They weren't even aware of the shame that they should have had for this attitude. Yet, there will be a faithful remnant.

Psalms

Like Zephaniah, the psalmist points out the need for humility. If you are going to boast, boast in the Lord. Turn to him and let go of your arrogance.

John of the Cross

Before turning to how Jesus addresses this most dangerous of human tendencies, let us consider St. John of the Cross. Like his namesake, John the Baptist, John of the Cross provides a path out of selfish ambition. It's in the simple contemplation of the radiant image of the Father's glory and the letting go of those things which keep us from that glory.

People who argue against the detachment and self denial are perhaps unaware that what both Johns speak of is the same teaching found everywhere in the New Testament and in all - not some - of the saints. In the 'dark night of the senses', John speaks of a letting go of being dominated by what will indulge our earthly senses. This is not a denial of our humanity, but a recognition that the experience of our senses points us to the greater reality. If we stop at the first, we will not get to the greater reality.

That is the thing that might be most strange to us. When I die to myself, I become more myself, because I am more free to allow God to transform me, not into the image I create for myself, not into someone else, not into nothingness, but into the child of God I have been created to be.

Death to one's senses and desires appears to us unhealthy, if not impossible. But, when earthly things are seen as the ultimate in satisfaction, heavenly joy becomes impossible. There is no room for it.

Contemplation of the radiant image of the Father's glory has come to light a fire in us, a burning love, a consuming longing for our greatest fulfilment. When we make an effort to just sit and contemplate God, at first it is punctured with distractions, but as one grows this love gets progressively stronger and deeper. John says that we gradually become infused with divine love from God grows to a point that the person is dying with love of him.

It is true that following the teachings of St. John of the Cross on prayer would take us some perseverance and effort. However, in the life of prayer, all effort is rewarded. God works with our smallest desires to seek him by making room for him.

Matthew

Zephaniah, the psalmist and John of the Cross all address the same thing Jesus does. This should make us perk up our ears at Jesus' parable of the two sons. Both sons have a bad attitude. We are likely one or the other of these two sons. The first one breaks the commandment to honour his father by saying 'no' to his face, a shameful behaviour. But this son changes his mind and does his father's will. For this to happen he must have had a moment of contemplation, where he sees the truth about himself and his duty to his father. This is a key to the importance of what John of the Cross speaks. Even a brief moment of true spiritual awareness can bring us into harmony with the God who invites us to do his will.

The first son is like the tax collectors and sinners. They are both far from holiness in their way of living. But they do something that is necessary in all who turn to God. When they hear the Good News, they recognize what darkness they are in and what dawning light might be waiting for them if they repent and turn their hearts around.

The second son initially does what is right. He shows respect for his father, even calling him 'sir' or 'his Lord'. This is exactly what is required of him. Why, then, does he end up not doing what his father asked him? Was it because his original respect was fake? Maybe it was real at the time, but he just couldn't be bothered following through.

But Jesus is speaking to Pharisees who do exactly the same. They pay great respect to God with their rituals and observance of many practices, but they don't practice true justice towards people.

Both sons in the parable, and both people in real life, are sinners. The difference is that one recognizes this truth and repents. The other does not.

Call To Action

Both sons are us, perhaps at one time or another. What do we need to be able to receive the kingdom of heaven, the child born for us to be truly born in us the

Christmas? St. John of the Cross says let the Lord enter in and infuse your soul. Let go of what keeps us apart. God will not leave us in our shame.

Key Passages

Zephaniah: *The word of the Lord to Zephaniah, concerning Jerusalem: It has listened to no voice, accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord nor drawn near to its God. I will change their speech so that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him... On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me. I will remove your proudly exultant ones... I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord ... and no one shall make them afraid.*

Psalms: *My soul makes its boast in the Lord. Let the humble hear and be glad ... When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears... He is near to the broken hearted and the crushed in spirit.*

Matthew: *Jesus in the temple spoke to the chief priests and the elders, saying: A man had two sons. He went to the first and said: Go and work in the vineyard. He answered: I will not, but later changed his mind and went. The second answered: I will go, sir, but did not. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said: The first. Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. And, even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe John.*

Prayer Over the Offerings: *Be pleased, O Lord, with our humble prayers and offerings.*

Prayer After Communion: *O Lord, teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven*