

Homily For Friday of the Third Week of Lent - Year I
St Peter's 8:30 am Mass - Friday, March 17, 2023

No God Like You

Introduction

I know what you are thinking. Well, besides the fact that it's a great day not to have to make lesson plans. You are thinking that the clergy are wearing the wrong colour. In the kindergarten class I was in yesterday, even the kids knew what to wear. In anticipation of today, they were in green from head to toe, from one end of the room to the other. They had everything but green beer. At least they didn't bring any out while I was there.

It's a feast day in Ireland. Apparently, in Boston and New York, the bishops there give a dispensation from Lenten Friday fasting. I haven't heard anything like that from our bishop, so don't go too crazy today. It is similar in Quebec on the feast day of John the Baptist, June 14. In both cases, there is a great revelry and a kind of joy that I believe God has made us for. I believe God has made us to look up from our trials and our fatigue and our stresses and our demands, even our difficulties. He has made us to receive the richest of blessings, in every way, spiritual and physical and emotional and mental and psychological.

However, the part we are missing is that the God who loves us and made us for blessing, also wants us to recognize and worship him, and him alone. Not because he needs it but because we need it. We are made for worship. Whenever we stop worshipping God, we will worship something around us, even ourselves and our own pleasure.

Now God is the great teacher of how we are to do this. Jesus comes directly from God to show us just how God teaches the most important things of all. This isn't the educational theory of John Dewey or Carl Rogers or Bloom's Taxonomy or even Maria Montessori. Like the celebration that happens today around St. Patrick, there is good in these theories. Carl Rogers believed that children learn through unconditional acceptance and understanding. Where did that come from.

Jesus teaches that: Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Unlike what Rogers teaches, Jesus then says, "Go and sin no more."

John Dewey believed that children must interact with their environment in order to adapt and learn. That's Jesus. Tell us Lord about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, a sower, a landowner, a father who loved his son ...

Maria Montessori believed that children are naturally curious and capable of learning independently at their own pace. That's Jesus, who says to the man who needs healing for his son, All things are possible for those who believe. the man says I believe. Help my unbelief. and the son is healed.

Bloom's Taxonomy approach allows students to build on their prior levels of understanding. Same with Marlowe's hierarchy of needs. That's Jesus: Love one another the way you love yourself. Then later, love one another the way you love me. Then at the end of his life and ministry, love one another the way I have loved you.

All of these and many more theories grab onto something that is really true about the way we have been made. They are all trying to find something that God has already revealed to us. There is a divine pedagogy, a divine path that is already built into us. God loved us into being. God sustains us through the gift of his own blessed life. God teaches us in the ways we are able to understand, at the pace we are able to grasp. And what is he teaching us? God does not need us, but has made us to share in his own blessed life. That is the principle that is the foundation for all true growth in body, mind and spirit.

Mark

A scribe was an educated man. He knew the law. He knew what God had taught from the beginning of Genesis, through the prophets and kings and priests and events of Israel's history. He comes to Jesus with this knowledge, but wants to get some kind of assurance. This scribe comes to Jesus and asks, "Which is first of all the commandments?" In other similar interactions, someone asks, which is the

greatest commandment. The scribe is asking essentially, "Which commandment is the critical one? You know, the thing I should be focused on." Jesus' answer is crystal clear. First, love God. Second, love your neighbor. He doesn't just say love God. He says to love God with your heart, your soul and your mind. That is your body, your spirit, and your intellect. Everything that you are is to love and serve the Lord.

You and I might say, yes I know the two great commandments. But why those? Here is where the Jewish rabbinic scholars see Jesus doing something no teacher had ever done before. We miss this because we don't have the same history with the Old Testament. This is the divine pedagogy. Jesus always took what they already knew, then added a new meaning to it. They were constantly astounded by what he taught them. It made sense in a whole new way that opened up the scriptures to their minds and hearts.

The prayer they were to say many times every day was the great Shema prayer from Deuteronomy, Chapter 6 . Hear, O Israel, the Lord is your God. This is how you must love him. Love God with your whole heart, soul and strength. Then he added "and with all your mind." Wait a minute. That wasn't there before. A new dimension.

But Jesus also did something else that a great teacher does. He took different parts of what they already knew and put them together in way that they had never heard before. You must also love your neighbour as yourself. Wait another minute. That's from Leviticus 19. No one had ever put those two together in just that way. Astounding. Loving God and loving neighbour are part of the same command to love. If you will give your service and your heart and your mind and your strength to God, you must also do that for your neighbour. And who is my neighbour it asks in another place? Not just those you get along with, but those you don't like. Not just the clean and neat and well off, but the poor who have no place to call home and make you uncomfortable.

The reality is Jesus is with us in every moment of our lives. He is fully aware, fully present in every moment of our lives. And, If we want to love him with our entire

beings, we need to become more aware of his constant presence. The best way to do that is by growing familiar with his life in us through prayer and the sacraments. By spending time with the Lord, and inviting him into our lives, we become aware that God is not distant. We are not on our own.

St Patrick

St. Patrick (387-493) was born in Scotland, kidnapped by Irish raiders, sold as a slave. Worked as a shepherd. What did he do with his misfortune? Spent much time in prayer as he labored. Learned the Celtic language, which later enabled him to evangelize the Celtic people. After six years of slavery, he fled, eventually becoming a priest and evangelized the pagans in Ireland, devoting the rest of his life to converting the island to Christianity. He suffered much opposition from those who, threatened by Christianity, conjured demonic power to defy him. However, the prayer, faith, fearlessness, and Episcopal authority of Patrick triumphed, and he was so successful in his endeavor that in the Middle Ages Ireland became known as the Land of Saints, and himself the "Apostle of Ireland." Later, the missionaries sent from Ireland to Europe were largely responsible for the Christianizing of the continent.

Call To Conversion

And that's why we drink green beer. But more than that, it teaches us, if we will listen, that we have no hope to follow Jesus' command to love him if we do not spend time getting to know and becoming aware of him. If you want to love God, you have to pray. Not once in a while. Not just at meals or at mass. You need to pray every day and throughout each day. We should be so comfortable in prayer that in every moment we are seeking to be connected to the Lord, and open to his voice in our lives.

In the oracle to Hosea we learn about God's love. He says, I will heal them of their unfaithfulness. I will love them freely. That's what God wants.

In Psalm 81, God says, Hear my voice. That's our summons this week. If we want to know what God wants to teach us, we have to listen to his voice.

Jesus says, listen to my voice. Take on my yoke. I am gentle and humble of heart and will give you rest for your souls.