

Homily for the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Whilst perusing the Sunday Mass readings from Sacred Scripture, not infrequently one sentence or phrase will jump out at me from the page (or rather the screen!)

Concerning this Sunday's readings, it was a phrase in the Second Reading from the Second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians which stood out for me: "... to stop me from getting too proud ...". Paul explains that the famous, but unspecified, "thorn in the flesh" which he says stops him from becoming too proud, has been integral to his whole life of holiness and mission. For Paul pride would destroy both his relationship with God and the fruitfulness of his mission.

Last Sunday week, in my homily for the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary time, I asserted that the fundamental sin is "unfaith". Strictly speaking the fundamental sin is pride, the first of the so called "seven deadly sins". However, we see in this Sunday's gospel how the two are closely related. Saint Mark tells us that Jesus was unable to work many miracles in his home town of Nazareth because of the Nazarenes' lack of faith. "This is the carpenter surely ...". Their pride blocks their faith in someone they considered too ordinary to be of much account, but someone who was in reality fully divine.

On that same Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the First reading from the Book of Wisdom exclaimed:

"God takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living
Death was not God's doing,
To be – for this he created all;
the world's created things have health in them,
in them no fatal poison can be found,
and Hades holds no power on earth;
for virtue is undying.
Yet God did make man imperishable,
he made him in the image of his own nature;
it was the devil's envy that brought death into the world,
as those who are his partners will discover."

God has not caused the pandemic, as some may claim, since "death was not God's doing". And yet via his inscrutable providence He draws good out of the evil which is the pandemic.

(We also heard recently from the Book of Job that "God spoke from the heart of the tempest".)

Through the Psalmist, God commands us:

"Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted over the earth." (Psalm 46:10)

Is it that the collective pride of the human race has yet again reached a stage where we have largely come to a point where we think we have no need of God, that we presume that He can be ignored (if He exists at all) or at least taken very much for granted? Today's Psalm 122 says:

“Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.

We are filled with contempt.

Indeed all too full is our soul
with the scorn of the rich,
with the proud man’s disdain.”

Has the pride of the family of man blocked our faith in the divine eternal Father of this family, and so blocked his saving power to rescue us from a situation that in some ways is going from bad to worse?

God is a loving Father who longs to save His human family, but his infinite desire to do so can be thwarted by an exaggerated attitude of human self-sufficiency which amounts to unfaith and pride - each feeding the other. Instead “Be still,” says the Lord, “and know that I am God.” Be still and pray together the refrain for today’s psalm: “Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.”

Another necessary aspect of this being still in God’s presence is to listen more carefully to the mission he is trying to announce to each of us, or to remind us of the mission we have forgotten about. If we have never known, or perhaps lost sight of our unique God given mission we are not living the Christian life and our life will not make sense.

Let us allow God to turn everything to our advantage as Saint Paul would say (*cf* Rom. 8:28), during this time of quiet and retreat, and to reconsider afresh what is my God given mission in life? All of us have a unique mission via our Baptism. One thing among so many wondrous things in the life of the Church is the incredible array of canonized saints from labourers and doorkeepers to kings and queens and popes, from saints who enjoyed robust good health to those who were chronically unwell and even bed-ridden. Each of us is uniquely called by God: let us listen more carefully to what and to where he is calling us from the heart of this pandemic.

With best regards, daily prayers and a Sunday Mass offering for all your needs at this time,
Fr John.