



HOMILY FOR THE TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

I had a conversation with this non-Catholic young man from a local Catholic High School. The young man said to me “I know you Catholics believe Jesus is your happiness, but I’m happy doing many of the things Jesus would not approve of. I don’t understand why I should believe in Him.” He continued, “I don’t see any reason why I shouldn’t seek to be rich and lie and cheat if I have to in order to get there.” So goes the thinking of many people in our world today. They believe they have to chase after power, pleasure, money, and honor and all the rest because that’s where happiness lies.

Throughout Jesus’ public ministry, he preaches, teaches, and lives the exact opposite of that worldly “wisdom.” Today he says, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” Ever since the Fall, we have been grasping for happiness, for what our hearts desire. What our hearts desire, though, is not for the taking. What our hearts desire is only to be received, because it is a gift that God wants to give us. What is this gift? Divine Life. All the riches, power, pleasure, and honor of the world cannot fill the cavernous ache of the human heart for God.

When we do not recognize that the way we are now (historical man) was not the way it was meant to be (original man) we cannot see anything more excellent than the enticements of the world to stop the ache. When we do not know the promise of Jesus - the resurrection and divinization of the body - we will settle for fast food and miss the wedding banquet. The consequence of the fall was this disintegration of our body and soul. As St. Paul says, “I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Rom 7:23). What are we to do? St. Paul asks the same question and gives us the answer: “Miserable one that I am! Who will deliver me from this mortal body? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:24-25).

Once we recognize our ache and the insufficiency of worldly answers, we can either turn to despair or to Jesus. Jesus came to give us the gift of eternal life. Eternal life is the full integration of man’s resurrected body with his immortal soul. There will be no more warring between the goods of the body and the goods of the soul. In fact in, “the composite, psychosomatic being that is man, perfection cannot consist in ...opposition [between body and soul]...but in a deep harmony between them, [and] in safeguarding the primacy of the spirit” (TOB 67:2). “The perfection of our being as body and soul, which is what it means to be human, will only reach its fulfillment in Heaven. Should we despair here on earth? No, of course, we should not.

“In earthly life, the mastery of the spirit over the body—and the simultaneous subordination of the body to the spirit—can, as the fruit of persevering work on oneself, express a spiritually mature personality; nevertheless, the fact that the energies of the spirit succeed in mastering the forces of the body does not take away the possibility of their reciprocal opposition” (TOB 67:2). The call of our earthly life is to become spiritually mature. We grow spiritually mature through the grace of the Sacraments, prayer, and the hard work of practicing the virtues. Since there is still the possibility of reciprocal opposition between our body and soul, we must be vigilant in these practices and ever more trusting in God’s love for us.

A year later, the same young man came to talk to me again by this time he was feeling the crushing weight of living in sin and seeking happiness in all the wrong places. There was a tone of despair in his voice. He thought there was no hope of turning his life around at this point. So I gently spoke to him of God’s immense love and unfathomable mercy for those who want it. I laid out for him a new path to embark upon. A path that leads to the reintegration of our body and soul — a path to spiritual maturity. A journey that leads to true happiness here and hereafter.

Our Gospel antiphon reminds us that “God has called us through the Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. 2 Thes 2:14). True happiness and possession of glory come from making a true gift of ourselves in love to God and others. We give ourselves to God through the vigilant practice of our faith and to others by “becoming the last of all and the servant of all.” This is the only answer to the ache of the human heart for God. Will we heed the answer?



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