

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 14, 2015

Readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34

The waiting was the worst part of all. Twice a year, my siblings and I waited and wondered whom would be called first in our semi-annual visit to the dentist, a dentist I might add parenthetically, did not believe in the use of Novocain! Though it has been years, to this day, the sound of a dentist's drill sends chills down my spine. But clearly, the waiting was the worst!

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” As a nine-year-old, the judgment seat was easily enough linked with the dentist, but later in life, we see how that image changes. And yet these words from our second reading, succinctly sum up the Christian journey of life. We want to please God, to be with him, and yet despite our desire to be with the Lord, we are also attached in many respects to this world. But one day, all will be laid bare.

What will that appearance will be like? Will it be akin to a Final exam in college, an appearance before a small claims judge, or an argument before the Supreme Court of the United States? I hope it will not as threatening as those appearances must be. But we can all agree that the stakes are high.

When you think of your own judgment, what images come to your mind? Our lives will be laid bare- all of our imperfections, sins and regrets- but so too all our acts of virtue. The Catechism teaches:

“Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ. The New Testament ...repeatedly affirms that each will be rewarded immediately after death in accordance with his works and faith.¹

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. # 1021

As Catholics, we ought to steer a middle course in this delicate area. While we do not believe that we can know with absolute certainty that we are saved, neither are we to live our lives paralyzed by the fear of losing our eternal souls. That kind of fear would reveal a lack of faith and trust in God's promises.

When we do appear before the judgment seat of Christ, of this much we may be certain. While God's justice is immediate upon death, it cannot be separated from his love. They are not opposed, but are two sides of the same coin. We just finished celebrating two great feasts—the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Both of them show forth the depths of love that God has for us and the depth of love that we ought to have for God. In both feasts, it is the love poured forth from the heart that stands out.

In 12th century France, a monk by the name of Richard of St. Victor could write: *Amor oculus est et amare videre est...* “Love is the eye, and to love is to see.” Love alone is able to see through the darkness of night and the darkness of our senses. Jesus came also to share in our “passions,” that is our feelings, our emotions. He came that we might enter into His depths ourselves, to be transformed in passion unto His likeness. Jesus does not desire to scare us into believing.

In our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel, the image of the Cedar tree is symbolic of how “the Lord will undo the actions of the Babylonian king by rebuilding the dynasty of King David, so the nations realize that only the God of Israel can restore a people's destiny.”² The Gospel image of the Mustard seed is a beautiful one for the Kingdom of God because it reveals that the Kingdom can grow, expand, and spread.

² New American Bible, footnotes for this passage, Ezekiel 17:22-24.

Right now, in this extremely difficult situation in our own local Church, we are going to have to see in the image of the mustard seed both a dose of reality and a hope for the future.

In the minds and hearts of so many, we are being brought low, losing valuable credibility and trust. And yet, we also take comfort that at the core, the work of the Church is in the parishes, and this ministry will continue the challenges at an institutional level.

The various images presented in all three readings today coalesce into a vision in which God, whether in separating a tender shoot from the cedar to make the withered tree bloom, or protecting the tiniest seed to facilitate a great mustard plant- in both of these, God protects the fragile beginnings, so that a stronger and more vibrant reality will emerge.

And when it does, we too will be strengthened individually, such that we ought not to be paralyzed in fear of judgment, human or divine. For now, God will strengthen our weak limbs, he will enable our life of faith to bloom and prosper, and even in the midst of everything swirling around us, we will remain courageous, aspiring to please God above all else.