

5th Sunday of Lent
March 21, 2021
“Conscience and God”

Jer 31:31-34
Heb 5:7-9
Jn 12:20-33

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

All of us are born with a sense of what is right and wrong. Every human being has a conscience that reminds them of what they should or should not be doing. But we also have free will. We can go against our conscience. We also have appetites and desires. And, often, we choose what is desirable and materially profitable instead of what is really right and good and best.

Nevertheless, it’s hard to completely stifle our conscience. So, when we become bothered by something we don’t want to change, we distract ourselves. We rationalize our behavior. We turn to escapes like alcohol, drugs, selfish eroticism, as well as other things. However, this only compounds the problem. And many of these so-called “escapes” become problems of their own and can even become addictions!

Our dissatisfaction, and even misery, continue to grow until we “bottom out”. At the bottom, we are faced with our naked soul and spirit. At that point, change and healing become possible if we face our real problems and begin the hard work that change requires. We must right the wrongs we have perpetrated – We must make apologies – We must begin the process of real human and spiritual development.

Sadly, if we do nothing, we become more and more miserable – Life becomes almost unlivable – And death is seen as the final solution or escape.

Like ourselves, the Chosen People had a hard time living up to who they were supposed to be according to the Covenant that God made with them through Moses on Mt. Sinai. Consequently, after years of unfaithfulness, God let them be all but destroyed and, then, exiled to Assyria and Babylon.

Nevertheless, today He tells them through Jeremiah that He would renew the Covenant with the few, the remnant, who were always faithful. These were the very few, who over the generations, had always remained faithful to the Lord God. They always listened to God and chose the right thing. Moreover, there would always be a smattering of that remnant over the future generations. And from them, would come the Christ – the Messiah!

The Son of God became that Messiah in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. But Jesus never had it any easier than anyone else. He lived a hard and difficult life on the edge of poverty. He had to wrestle with the forces of evil and the darkness around him. He had to search his own heart and spirit for what was good and right and best – for all that the Father truly wanted.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals exactly what he would have to do. In symbolic language, he tells his disciples that he must die a tragic death. However, in his free-will act of submitting to torture and death – much good would come. That good would be universal salvation for those who followed him.

Jesus also tells us that nothing in the material world can fill our human hearts – or give us an absolutely fulfilling life here. We must let our conscience lead us from the alluring things of our world and culture into the infinitely satisfying realm of the divine – into the kingdom of God! No politics, no amount of wealth, no position, power, or worldly success – no enjoyment of the pleasures of life – can ever replace the presence of God – and the peace of that presence within us!

Consequently, we must make every effort to unite ourselves with Jesus – Because Jesus took our human nature and raised it into the divine! He did this by being “lifted up” through his death on the cross and with his Resurrection and Ascension to God's right hand. Thus, Jesus brought the divine to us if we join ourselves to him and live in him!

This process will not be easy. If we are joined to Jesus, we must also accept suffering and death as part of the journey we must make through this life.

The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus, himself, asked God to spare him from the suffering and death that he anticipated. Jesus died – but he was spared from eternal death and the spiritual death of his soul. Jesus prayed with reverence for all that the Father had given him and for all that the Father would ask of him.

In this, he became obedient – that is, he was able to hear God in all that he suffered. Instead of escapes, Jesus turned to God and was, ultimately, raised up so that we could possess eternal life with him.

Brothers and Sisters, it is only by dying to ourselves that we will bear fruit. It is only by losing what is called “life” here, that we preserve our real life for eternity! So, let us pray, today, that we always follow the voice of conscience – the voice of God which calls us to Himself!

Amen.

March 21, 2021

Msgr. Russell G. Terra