

September 29, 2019

26 Sunday of Ordinary Time

One of the major themes in the Bible is that of Covenant. The word “testament” means covenant. The Bible is divided into major sections, the old and the new covenant or testament. Jesus is *the* covenant of God, the new and everlasting covenant.

The biblical meaning of the word covenant can be summed up in this message, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” In the Old Testament God is the one who establishes the covenant and then renews the covenant when we failed to keep up on our part of the agreement. In the New Testament Jesus establishes that covenant eternally through his blood on the cross. The biblical understanding of the covenant for the Jewish people implied not only a deep unity with God, but also with other. Over the centuries, while the rest of Rome struggled with what to do with poor on the streets, much like almost every major city in our country today, the Jewish quarter of Rome seemed to have few problems. Their understanding of the covenant moved the wealthy to make sure that the poor had what they needed.

With this context, we can see Lazarus and the rich man’s lack of concern for Lazarus is so deeply offensive to the biblical notion of covenant. Lazarus and the poor man shared the covenant together; they were both children of Abraham. The rich man even knows Lazarus by name, and had to practically step over him to get out of his door. The sumptuous meals that the rich man eats are a reminder of the banquet that the forgiving father throws with the return of his son in the story of the prodigal son that we read just two Sundays ago. There is one big difference and that is the banquet of the forgiving father was a celebration of mercy, compassion and reconciliation. That meal was a celebration of the covenant! The daily banquets of the rich man on the other hand, are meals of pure opulence and self-indulgence. He has little or no regard for Lazarus who is not only hungry, but was covered with sores and has to endure impure dogs licking him, which was a high offense against the dignity of the human person in the ancient world. What we see here is that the rich man has no regard for the covenant. Then, to underline just how much the rich man “doesn’t get it” he asks Father Abraham in the afterlife to order Lazarus around like a servant, “Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue . . . send him to

my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them" The meaning of the covenant escaped the rich man as much in the afterlife as it did in this life. Abraham, like the forgiving father in the story of the Prodigal Son, never loses sight of the covenant, and still calls the rich man, "my son."

Another important word in this gospel is the word chasm. The rich man is the one who created the chasm in this life created a great chasm by failing to see Lazarus as his brother which carried over to the next life. Today's gospel is a stark reminder that our actions in this life will have consequences for the life that is to come. God did not create a chasm between heaven and earth. Jesus the new and eternal covenant creates a permanent unity of heaven and earth in person through his two natures his Divine nature and his human nature. When we give ourselves to Christ, we accept him not only spiritually, but also physically, with our whole being, so that every action, every thought, every word we speak either is in union with him or is against him. In that sense, the consequences of how we live in this life, and most especially how we treat our neighbor and the person most in need are greater than before. We must be on guard not to great chasm for ourselves in the next life.

The radical unity of heaven and earth in the new and eternal covenant of Jesus is a framework from which we, through grace of God, can overcome all divisions. Jesus is the path to overcome any way that we may want to think of people as "them and us" separate from each other rather and "we together". I attended the training session about people who come to Mass who may display some form of mental illness which was a great reminder that the place to start is to not think of them as "them and us" but "we together." To be human is to experience illness. All of us at one time or another, gets a cold or the flu. Many of us experience illnesses or conditions in our bodies that can be much more serious. I was diagnosed with Grave's Disease just before I was ordained a priest. Since that treatment, I have to take a pill every day to replace the function of my thyroid that no longer exists. Without the proper treatment, I would not be alive today.

The brain is one of the organs of our body, and a very important one since it controls all the functions of our body and even our way of interacting in the world. It can become ill like any other part of our body. Almost all of us have experienced some form of depression or anxiety. Many people even have at least

passing thoughts of committing suicide. I am sure that there are people here today who take medication to keep the function of their brain healthy. We together experience mental illness either directly or indirectly. The trainers pointed out that people who come to our churches with serious mental illness very rarely are looking to harm anyone rather they are on a desperate search for healing. Aren't we all in need of healing? When we recognize that we are on a common search for healing and that we believe that Jesus is the source of all healing we will overcome our fear which creates a chasm. When we approach people with the profound spirit of peace that comes from Jesus that will in most cases, calm the fear and anxiety of those who are mentally ill. We also need to be wise, and make sure that everyone is safe. The place to start is not with fear, but with peace. Fear creates chasms. Inner peace of Jesus builds unity, which will help us to live the covenant that he has made with us.