

There are universal values that we share.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Is 50:5-9a , Ps 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9, Jas 2:14-18, Mk 8:27-35



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My remarks today come from a quiet reflection as I watched the hummingbirds at our feeders. I still wonder how that they are able to make a 500-mile trip across the gulf, nonstop. Our world is fascinating with always something more to be seen and understood. Earlier in the week, I noticed a young girl of three or four running and skipping down the street as only a child can; two or three steps then skip and repeat. She appeared to be alone and that was of concern. Grandparents soon appeared around the corner, not doing double-time but time-and-a-half trying to keep pace. Before they passed by, I waved and called out, “You know it doesn’t get better than this!” They laughed and waved back, saying, “You’ve got that right.” These were strangers, who like all of us, value and celebrate the gift of new life. *There are universal values that we share.*

In the spiritual journey, we move from the historical person of Jesus to the deeper more intimate knowledge and experience of Christ. In each of the four Gospels, there is the account of Jesus asking Peter, “Who do people say that I am?” This dialogue is Peter’s confession of faith. In Matthew’s Gospel, Simon Peter replies, “You are the Messiah the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.” Matt 16:16

“Who do *you* say that I am,” is a wonderful question for each of us on the journey. Answering the question requires that we create quiet space to listen for the voice of our Creator. For all of Simon Peter’s insight, when hearing that Jesus must suffer and die, he loses focus and is rebuked by Jesus. How easy it was for the world to distract Simon Peter. And certainly, there is greater distraction for us today. Jesus asks us to see beyond the distractions so that we might grow in our capacity to love. Our love is a death of self that allows the Creator to reveal his Son.

Fr. Henry Nouwen, frames it this way, “Am I afraid to die? I am every time that I let myself be seduced by the noisy voices of my world telling me that my “little life” is all that I have and advising me to cling to it with all my might. But when I let these voices move to the background of my life and listen to that small voice calling me the Beloved, I know that there is nothing to fear and that dying is the greatest act of love, the act that leads me into the eternal embrace of my God whose love is everlasting.”

Saint James, in our second reading, draws our attention to the question of good works. For James, good works are the key to salvation. He asks, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” The caution for the reader is the emphasis on good works, and by extension, the number of good works. Salvation is not a meritocracy where each act of compassion and mercy are counted. Rather, salvation is a gift. We love in this world, not as a means to an end, but because in the need and hurting of another, we recognize the Christ.

It is true that a healthy tree produces good fruit. Our compassion for the immigrant and marginalized, is the fruit of our spiritual journey. It is in these encounters that we answer the question, “Who do *you* say that I am?” To be part of that unfolding mystery in which Christ is revealed, is our treasure.

Joy is recognizing Christ’s love in grandparents hurrying to keep pace with their grandchild. Joy is recognizing Christ in the stranger that journeys with us. Our St. Tom’s community, in its outreach, recognizes those that are hurting and in need. My friends, It is a blessing to pray and celebrate with you.

Today, we hold memories of 9/11, a 20-year war, drought, fire, floods, air pollution, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, climate change, and yes, a pandemic. Where do we find God in all of that? Where do we find hope?

Msgr. Fitzgerald once wrote, “Children are from Heaven. They are the gift of hope and joy and confidence in our weary, worrisome world. In the years that remain to me, I want to help them learn; I want to encourage their hope and laughter. I want to see them reach out to every new morning with assurance, and fall off to sleep every evening, peaceful and full of their dreams of the day.”

In a divided world of many voices, it is good to know that *there are universal values that we share*. Children are our common denominator and a reminder of God’s love for the human family. To love our children is to love our humanity. Loving our humanity gives us hope and the means to move beyond our obstacles. To that end, new priorities are necessary.

I leave you this question to pray with and ponder; ‘What if our ecological, political and economic decisions were all formulated, not for our immediate gratification and gain, but for the benefit of the children in this and the next generation?’ In that wisdom, the gifts we have been given are assured for the future generations. It is simply good stewardship.

I can almost hear Msgr. Fitzgerald, “Well, it’s just the right thing to do.”

In this Eucharist may God open my ears that I may hear the question, “Who do *you* say that I am?”

References

All scripture quotations are taken from. *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB, 1987.

I welcome your questions and comments. My email is fsila@sttomskazoo.org. n.d.

Nouwen, Fr. Henri. *Dying Leads to Love - Daily Meditations*. 5 September 2021.