



Homily for 11/8/2020

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A / 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

“You know not the day nor the hour”. As we approach the end of the liturgical year, just like the shortening days remind us that our life is short, so, too, the readings start to remind us of the return of our Savior on the last day. In the Ordinary Form readings this Sunday, we hear an exhortation and warning to be ready and vigilant for the coming of Jesus the Bridegroom of our souls.

Of course, Jesus was talking about the “last day”, That Day, the Dies Irae, the Day of Wrath, that in the Gospel he likens to a locked door. We hope to be on the inside where there will be the Wedding Feast, not on the outside where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Wisdom would have us prepared to be inside with the Bridegroom who is the key to the locked door. Foolishness would squander the present moment and leave us out in the cold, unprepared to welcome Him on that day. We are called to be wise in the ways of the Lord, not in the ways of the world, so that when that day comes, we will be ready to greet Him, and through Him, enter into eternal rest.

This Christian wisdom tells us how we are supposed to conduct ourselves in this present age. In the Extraordinary Form readings for today (23<sup>rd</sup> after Pentecost) we hear from St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, where he says, “For alas, many go about in a manner which shows them to be enemies of the cross of Christ.” The truth is that this past year has revealed the hearts of many. First with a worldwide pandemic, then storms and disasters, and then with a very bitter and divisive election that has threatened to tear us apart. When we do an examination of conscience this year, we have to ask ourselves, “Have I had the wisdom of Christ or the foolishness of the world as my guide?” Have I clung to the Cross of Christ as our only hope or have I shown myself to be an enemy of the Cross of Christ?” Have these crises refined my faith, like gold tested in fire, or have I allowed my heart to become embittered, cold, ugly and hateful? I think that if we are honest, more often than not, we resemble the latter rather than the former. But here is the Good News: Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it also we await a savior. He will come on the last day to judge the living and the dead, and He will be established as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. All other earthly powers will pass away, and God will be all in all. This is what our faith teaches us. Why do we forget that every time elections roll around? We get so caught up in the present moment that we forget that in the bigger scheme Christ is still King and heaven is still our goal. If the political movements help us as a Christian people, we rejoice. If political movements hurt us, we rejoice all the more to be found worthy to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus, just like the Apostles in the Book of Acts. In fact, if we look at history, the Church has generally been holier and more effective in times of persecution than she has been in times of welcome, embrace and abundance. The Church’s spiritual mission of salvation of souls is too often usurped by the lure of temporal ends. Too often we have been confused – and have even confused ourselves with just another non-profit group, instead of being God’s Holy People destined to reign with Him in Heaven for eternity. Too often we have allowed our vision of who we are to be reduced to humanistic terms rather than raised to the divine realities for which we were ultimately made. Nations will rise and fall. Politicians will come to power and lose power. That is the way of the world. The wisdom of God tells us, “Put not your trust in human beings, in mortal men who cannot save.” (Psalm 146:3). The divisions that exist in the Church come from making this foolish mistake. Whether right, left or center we all in one way or another have contributed to the division – either from an action or an inaction, from a word or remaining silent. From being too invested or being apathetic. The reality is that the division in our Church and in this country starts right in our own hearts.

I want to share with you some of the wisdom I have found in the midst of this year’s crisis. It is ok to have enemies. In fact, Jesus expected we would have enemies and gave us a command to love our enemies. There are so many who confuse the call to be kind with the concept that we have to be friends with everyone. We don’t have to pretend to agree, nor do we have to compromise our ideals. One does not have to condone or accept the other’s ideas or behaviors in order to be a Good Christian. It is ok if we have enemies, and we as people who profess the



fullness of the Christian Faith have many enemies. Jesus taught us to love our enemies. For sure, we can make the necessary distinction that true love calls people back from error rather than confirming them “where they are”. But let’s not make the mistake of calling people out of error without charity and kindness. I believe this is the error of many traditional and orthodox Christians, of which I count myself one. But as Christians – “Wisdom, be attentive,” – we are not allowed to let hate reign in our hearts.

St. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians 4:25-26, “Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger.” I have seen people on both the left and the right, and even a few in the middle, let the sun set on their anger, harboring it and flaming it into wrath. They have been downright hateful in their rhetoric online, in person and in passing. It is scandalous and very counterproductive. They have confused being right with being righteous. It has been supposed that somehow if they were right they were free to break all the rules and smash and tear down people’s reputations, run people through the mud, pillage and riot, shout and insult. The truth is: you can be right in the wrong way. The truth is not a bludgeon to be wielded like a weapon to beat sinners to death. God does not will the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live. God woos us with the beauty of His truth like a lover who is intent on the good of the beloved. This is why beauty is one of the most privileged ways to evangelize – beautiful things and people capture our hearts. But when we let anger and wrath sway our hearts, even if we are right, we turn very ugly. We must take account of how our bouts of anger during this past election cycle have driven people away from faith. Whether it is our online rhetoric, comments in comment threads, in person or behind closed doors, the way we Christians have treated one another, both left and right, is a source of scandal. Take note, if you think I am talking about “him” or “her”, there are just as many people thinking I’m talking about you. We need to all do a deep examination of conscience, just like the apostles did at the Last Supper: “And while they were eating, Jesus said, ‘Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely it is not I, Lord?’” We have all had our part to play in the state this world finds itself in. We need to be deeply distressed by this. We must do an examination as a nation, as a community, as a Church and as a parish, and repent. I propose as our examination St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians, where in Chapter 2 he says,

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.  
For God is the one who, for his good purpose,  
works in you both to desire and to work.  
Do everything without grumbling or questioning,  
that you may be blameless and innocent,  
children of God without blemish  
in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,  
among whom you shine like lights in the world,  
as you hold on to the word of life”

For the times I have grumbled, I repent.  
For the times I have not been innocent, I repent.  
For the times I have been the cause of blemishes to the body of Christ, I repent.  
For the times I have not shown forth the light of Christ for a dark world, I repent.  
For the times I have not loved my enemies, I repent.

As our nation reels from a bitter and divisive election, a year of global pandemic and uncertain future, I call upon all the faithful to hold on to the Word of Life and shine like lights in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. Let’s be the first to forgive. Let’s be the first to ask for forgiveness. Let’s forgive even when not asked. Let’s engage the Ministry of Reconciliation that has been handed on to us so that the Message of Salvation can be known by all. We are called in this moment to have the Wisdom of God. As a final word, I will give you wisdom from Pope Benedict XVI, where at World Youth Day in 2011 he said, “Dear friends, may no adversity



paralyze you. Be afraid neither of the world, nor of the future, nor of your weakness. The Lord has allowed you to live in this moment of history so that, by your faith, his name will continue to resound throughout the world.”

May Jesus Christ be Praised!