



Homily for 8/9/2020

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10<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Extraordinary Form

I must confess - I watch too much YouTube. But it is interesting what you find on that video content platform. One subject that I have recently come across is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of videos showing the Sentinels of the Tomb from the 3rd Infantry Regiment known as the “Old Guards.” With the maximum amount of dignity and reverence, with stoic faces, perfectly prepared uniforms, spotless rifles and metal clad shoes, they march to and fro, two hours at a time, to guard the tomb of the unknowns: soldiers whose war-torn mortal remains cannot be identified. If anyone dare violate the cordoned off sanctuary surrounding the tomb, they get a swift rebuke from the guard who demands that everyone remain behind the chains and rails. Should anyone raise their voice beyond a whisper, a similar swift rebuke is made to maintain a level of silence and respect.

This is how our nation has seen fit to honor and reverence those who gave their lives for our country: with silence and respect, dignity, and reverence. It begs the question for us here. How do we approach God? How do we keep watch in His presence? What is our inner and outer expression in His temple? How are we *supposed* to approach God? What *should* our inner and outer expression be?

I believe that the idea of what is Holy has been eroded in modern man and therefore our idea of reverence is impaired. We are inundated with false data about who God is, and therefore we have lost the proper sense of how to behave in his presence. In so many places formality and reverence has been replaced with informality, familiarity and casualness. So many churches have been stripped of the expressions of the “Old Guards” and replaced with a coffee house atmosphere with carpets, TV screens, and loud pop music that has us tapping our feet. Is that the proper disposition of heart and body towards the divine? Our country does something very, very different to show respect for fallen soldiers. Why do we gather around the altar of our God’s self-sacrifice with anything but that level of dignity and reverence?

On another level, there is the inner disposition of our hearts. We come to reverence and worship a God who teaches us clear truths about who we are and how we are to act. We have to make an examination of conscience as we enter here. Do we come to mass and look for reasons to despise our neighbor’s failings, forgetting that the heart of God is Mercy? Or do we forget that God is a demanding God, reaping where he does not sow and gathering where he had not scattered and come rather with a dismissive attitude that thinks God doesn’t care how we treat Him or others? So many come with the presumption that they will be saved and say, “Why waste the effort on repentance and conversion?” Others come thinking thoughts of self-hatred and shake with servile fear, not knowing in their hearts that God is a merciful father who loves us as His very own children. The way you approach God probably depends on what you think of Him. Is He your magic wand, who, when wielded, will strike down your enemies, and so he becomes your mercenary? God may fight on your behalf, but He is not your mercenary. Is He your jukebox, who, when told to, plays your favorite song? God is not your personal minstrel, placed here to entertain you. Is God your teddy bear whose sole purpose is to give you a feeling of comfort? God is not a stuffed animal and inanimate object. He is a lion. He is not tame, but He is good.

Who is God? Is he the harsh and cruel judge who will make an accounting of every penny owed and throw you into jail until you pay? Where is His mercy? Is he the Non-confrontational Jesus who accepts all actions as good and never dares to damn anyone to hell, whose only existence is to make us feel good about ourselves and have warm fuzzy sentiments of affirmation in the midst of our depravity? Where is His Justice? Is He somewhere in the middle? *Virtus in medio stat*, said the philosopher.



Does God ever tell us who He is and how we are to approach Him? Plenty of times, yes. He reveals His majesty and power to the Israelites. He reveals also His tenderness. To Moses He reveals Himself in the burning bush, “Take off your shoes; this is holy ground” The angel of death at Passover manifests His power over life and death. The feeding of the Israelites in the desert showed His great Providence. The lover in the Song of Songs shows us God’s tender heart of love for us His beloved.

Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God. “I am, who am” becomes man like us and takes on the name Jesus, “God Saves.” Jesus says, “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees,” but He also says, “Let the little children come to me.” He turns over the money changers’ tables but is also led like a lamb to the slaughter.

In the Gospel today, our God clearly illustrates two ways to approach Him. One is right, the other is wrong. Wisdom, be attentive. The wrong way is the way of pride, self-righteousness and arrogance. The right way is the way of humility, repentance and submission. How have you been taught to approach God? Who taught you?

Mother Church teaches us through her liturgy. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in both the Ordinary and Extraordinary Form, I might add, begins with acts of humility, repentance and submission. I confess. Lord, Have Mercy. It bids us bend the knee and strike our breasts, *Domine Non Sum Dignus*. Lord I am not worthy. One can walk through the motions in either form. Coming into the presence of God requires discernment.

You don’t have to be perfect; you just can’t be indifferent. It requires our submission to the act of faith, *Credo*, I believe, even if you are still learning the words. The reality is that two people can do the same things. One person can be going through the motions, acting as if God were his vending machine: I say the words and He gives me the snack - a prideful sense of commercial exchange - I do my thing and then God had better do His; I deserve it. The other can come burdened by the weight of the sufferings of this world and forget the words and stumble over the responses and be distracted by myriad things and yet have a humble and contrite heart. Which one goes away justified? Intent matters. The disposition of the heart matters. The father, who sees in secret, will know the difference.

But at the same time, the external manifestation matters, too. Intent is not everything. Matter matters. The way we do things expresses things, too deep for words. Even the publican in the Gospel bowed his head and struck his breast, a wordless witness to the disposition of his heart. Grace builds on nature, action follows being, and intent is manifest in the manner in which we do a thing. Do it sloppily the first time – we excuse the novice. Do it sloppily the hundredth time – we identify the lazy and indifferent.

God is Mercy, but His mercy is the completion of Justice. His mercy is ordered towards our perfection not our exemption and excusing. God’s mercy is not meant to confirm us in our evil ways, but rather to give us the grace to be purified from them. The Collect of today’s Mass so beautifully sums this up: “O God, You manifest Your power, particularly in forbearance and pity. Show us Your mercy again and again, so that hastening toward Your promises we may become partakers of the blessings of heaven.” Partaking of the blessings of heaven is for the pure of heart. God’s mercy, again and again, is ordered towards the purification of our faults.

We want to be partakers of the blessing of heaven which, in the end, is eternal perfection in God. We slip up, we fail, we falter; those are forgivable sins. The one unforgivable sin is to give up, and worse, to think “God won’t care,” or, “I don’t need to change.” To presume and to abuse His mercy is the greatest of sins.

If you listen intently to our statement of Faith, we profess the opposite: “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” He is not a cruel judge but He is just. His judgement was rendered already when He looked with compassion on the crowds, when he forgave his murderers, “they know not what they do”. He anticipated it with the woman caught in adultery, “Does no-one condemn you? Neither do I, but go and sin no more.” He is not



a cruel judge, but He is just. His mercy is ordered towards purification. If we do not humbly submit to His offer of Mercy we will not be able to withstand the reality of His Justice.

Our nation has seen fit to watch over the tomb of the unknown soldier with dignity and reverence. How do we keep the vigil watch before our Lord's Life, death and Resurrection from the dead? One can go to the Mass, with pride and hardness of heart, and leave confirmed in deadly sin. But be assured, there will be a rebuke from the sentinel angels on the last day. But one also can go to Mass with a humble and contrite heart and come out justified like the publican in the Gospel. May this be so in all our hearts. It all depends on how you approach God.

May Jesus Christ be praised!