



Homily for 11/10/2019

32nd Sun. Ordinary Time, C

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Heaven Is Our Goal

It is true that God loves the world. But before we get too deep into any naiveté it is important to realize that the world does not always love God. Since the Original Sin there has been a tension, even a rebellion that stems from the three classic enemies of the soul: the devil, the flesh, and the world. But why does the world hate God, His Church and the Catholic Faith? Pride is the answer.

All of our honor, glory and praise belong by right to God alone. Yet the rebellious devil, our own ego and by extension the whole created world that we inhabit seeks to misdirect this honor, glory and praise to itself rather than its proper end in God. As St. Athanasius summed up, “they transferred the honor which is due to God to material objects such as wood and stone, and also to human beings.” (*De Incarnatione*, ch. 3) This is the source of the tension – the world screams, “Look at me instead of God!” Hence the great angst we experience. St. Augustine famously said, “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you!” God, knowing our fall, and having compassion on His own creation, whispers His love song, “I am the Lord your God, seek My face even as I seek to be in union with you.” This is why He came to physically be in union with us in the person of His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, True God and True Man. Again St. Athanasius sums it up, “When, then, the minds of men had fallen finally to the level of the [sense appetites], the Word submitted to appear in a body, in order that He, as Man, might center their senses on Himself, and convince them through His human acts that He Himself is not man only but also God, the Word and Wisdom of the true God.” (ibid) In making Himself like the world, God was able to redirect man back to his proper orientation towards God. By proclaiming this “right orientation” of humanity towards God, the Christian presents freedom to a humanity that is enslaved to the flesh. Why then, if we come proclaiming freedom to those in slavery, do we find such resistance to the Gospel in the world? Jesus Himself sums it up in the Gospel of John when He said, “And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.”

The reality is that we are addicted to the world and the flesh, and by not surrendering it to God, the ultimate Master of all, we are in fact impeding the true glory of our own flesh in the resurrection. We are going through an epoch in which all morality – especially concerning marriage, sexuality, procreation and even pre-natal life – has been turned on its head. Why? Because we have forgotten the truth that we were not made for this world. We rather cling to the world, as sometimes we are tempted to cling to dead things out of a misplaced sentimentality. But Catholic Christian morality only makes sense with Catholic Christian faith: namely, that we are ultimately made for God, and that this life on earth will end. But our faith does not stop simply at the Day of Doom, but rather we believe something even better is in store for us if we remain faithful to He-who-is-the-Way. The Way through death into Life. And the reality is that there is no way except through Jesus.

This is what Jesus is proclaiming in the Gospel today. He reveals God’s will for humanity as life, not death. “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”. He emphasizes to the Sadducees that this statement is not in a past tense. God did not say, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” rather He says, “I Am.” God is the God of the living, not the dead. And in Jesus Christ, he intends to bring back to life the bodies of those who had died in death. But the flesh and the world abhor death. They love themselves too much. None of us should like death. But God has asked us to love Him more than we love ourselves. And if we do, something even greater is in store for us, something we could not have even imagined much less done for ourselves: namely, heaven. In this way, Jesus comes to show us a way through that which is inevitable. Rather than fear death, He teaches us to embrace it with faith in His power to overcome it. “Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.” But the worldliness in all of us is resistant to this truth, and we claim to be content, remaining as a mere grain of wheat and not bearing the fruit for which we are made. This is the great tragedy of the selling short of humanity, found most notably in the immanentistic philosophies of our own day,



such as secular humanism and communism, as well as modernism and liberation theology within the Church. They are merely about human progress in this life. They remain earth-bound and materialistic. They are not philosophies of true freedom but mere esoteric exercises whose goal is to mask the reality of our supernatural destiny and to deaden the sense appetites by doubling down on our addiction to worldly things. It is the one thing that Christians cannot do. This is why the world hates us. St. Augustine famously said, “On no point does the Christian faith encounter more opposition than on the resurrection of the body.”

But the whole of Catholic Christian morality, sacraments of vocation and states in life are all predicated upon this central mystery that on the Last Day our bodies will rise and be joined to our souls and will live eternally either in the heaven of the just or the hell of the damned. This is reason for my great sadness when even well-meaning people within the Church try to make so many accommodations to the world. Instead of preaching fidelity to God, putting away idols, and giving all honor glory and power to God, we make so many provisions for the flesh and capitulate to the logic and demands of the world. To bring it back to the Scripture presented today, it is the reason that we forgo idolizing a spouse – because death will do us part in the end. This is Jesus’ clear teaching to the question of the Sadducees. Ultimately the true spouse of our soul is God, not a human being. It is also the reason many forgo marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven; to live even now the life of total dedication to God in the vocation of celibacy. This vocation is needed even more now in our day as a clear proclamation of our hope in heaven. And yet there are so many who are ready to abandon our Lord’s counsel to celibacy for the sake of a worldly understanding of the human being. But thanks be to God for the constant witness of the Fathers of the Church, whose teaching ground us in the truth. St. Cyprian famously said when speaking to consecrated virgins, “What we shall be, you have already begun to be. You already have in this world the glory of the resurrection.” A shortage of priests should not make us abandon our supernatural hope and the call for people to lay down their lives for the sake of the kingdom. Rather, now is the time to double-down on our supernatural destiny and proclaim the fullness of truth even more loudly and forcefully. It is the reason the martyrs lay down their lives and earthly prosperity in order to gain an imperishable crown and a treasure that neither moth can destroy nor thief steal. Belief in the resurrection of the dead is worth dying for.

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. The truth about the human condition and where we find ourselves is sometimes startling, many times disconcerting. But in all of this God is faithful, and clinging to Him is our only hope of salvation.

So, how does one take this prayer? In our prayer we should have a longing for heaven; a longing for Christ to come again to make an end to this broken world and to give us the world to come; a prayer for the strength to die to self and live for God; a prayer for the breaking of the bonds of death, addiction, fear, and worldliness so as to live in the freedom of the children of God. Pray with the Psalm: “When I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding your presence.”