

Third Sunday of Easter/April 18, 2021

I'd Love to Change the World, but

The most beautiful and powerful works of art or literature are those which have inspired the soul and mind of its audiences for generations. In 1971, the song "I'd Love to Change the World" was released by the musical group Ten Years After. Its' lyrics paint a picture of a turbulent, complicated society which has lost common sense and the essence of right and wrong, until the lead vocalist shares, "I'd love to change the world, but I don't know what to do." These words express the sentiments of many in our communities today --- so many of us are searching for happiness, for ourselves, for those we know and love, and for those in society who are living on the fringes, who are suffering in spirit, mind or body. One can't help but look back since this song's release and realize that we've made less progress as a society than many thought we would.

Why do you suppose this is?

It's good that the world seeks justice, righteousness and contentment for all people. But, the world must look to the lessons of Christ for solutions, not the current trends or whims of fault-filled men --- look to Him who is perfect for perfect guidance. In today's Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples, "Why are you troubled?" --- and I ask this of the world today, "Why are you troubled?" --- the answer is that we don't place our trust in Jesus Christ. As years go by, it seems that more and more of the world has no knowledge of who Jesus Christ is --- and those who say they do know Jesus, seem to have turned away from Him, and toward the idols of money, stature, entertainment or other forms of self-gratification. We've become fixated on achieving happiness in the wrong places, and through the wrong paths, often with the wrong people. Too many of us fail to stop our busy lives, even for only a few seconds, to reflect to the depths of our soul the love and concern which Jesus has for us, for every single person He has created. What Jesus says in today's passage He says to each of us, "look at my hands and my feet . . . touch me and see" --- don't doubt but have faith,

there is no love like Mine! Jesus is begging each of us to contemplate His torture and death, not so He may be praised, but so that we may be saved!

As Jesus whispered on His cross, our Lord is “thirsting” to share an intimate relationship with each of us, a relationship which will have its own particular “finger-print” --- no two relationships with our Savior are precisely the same because He has made you one of a kind. You have a special place in Jesus’ heart which no one else can fill. Jesus wants us to seek Him above all things because He knows that with Him we will find perfect happiness. But, how far has our world drifted from God while it’s accelerated it’s often misguided search for good --- in policy, practices, companionship. Modern secularism considers those who hold to many of Jesus’ teachings to be out-of-touch with human emotions and needs. Yet, in our second reading, St. John shares a stern lesson, “those who do not keep his commandments are liars . . . but whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him.”

So, what would we say to the lead vocalist of Ten Years After in response to his, “. . . but I don’t know what to do.”?

It is through encountering Jesus in the Eucharist, in Confession, in prayer and in service to those in need, that we are raised in strength and wisdom to do His will. Today, Luke’s Gospel tells us how His disciples’ were lifted from despair to hope when Jesus made Himself known to them in the Eucharist on the road to Emmaus. And, again, when Jesus appeared to them in the upper room, He consoled them and prepared them for their ministries --- because it was now their responsibility to proclaim Jesus’ revolutionary messages of love and forgiveness to the world.

As it was in those moments when the risen Lord appeared to His disciples, it is today, when so much of the world speaks of the need for revolutionary change. St. Vincent Ferrer teaches us, “If you truly want to help the soul of your neighbor,

you should approach God first with all your heart. Ask Him simply to fill you with charity, the greatest of all virtues; with it you can accomplish what you desire.”

How different an approach is this to what we see commonly represented in the behavior of many “so-called” leaders of our society --- in politics, in media and entertainment, even in activism. How often do we witness finger-pointing and accusations of wrong-doing? Contrast this with the words of Jesus in the upper room who wished His disciples --- those who had denied, betrayed and abandoned Him --- peace and mercy when He appeared. Jesus died on His cross to establish love and forgiveness as the guiding principles of humanity because they are the guiding principles of divinity. The more freely we exhibit and share these principles with our neighbors, the closer we share in Christ’s divinity in this world and in the world to come. St. Ephrem the Syrian expresses this very well, “Do not look for the faults of your friend. Do not repeat the short comings of your neighbors in your talk. You are not the judge of creation. You do not have dominion over the earth. If you love righteousness, admonish your soul and yourself. Be the judge of your own sins, and chastise your own transgressions.”

In the days to come, let us commit ourselves to sharing the mercy and forgiveness of God with every person we meet. And, let us avoid the sources of conflict, like some of the things we see on television or the internet, which so commonly teach us the ways of revenge and suffering --- I don’t know a single person who feels spiritually closer to God after watching the news or political commentary --- pay attention to feelings like that. The Holy Spirit is speaking to you.

May the love of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ, fill your hearts now and forever.
Amen.