

WEDNESDAY APRIL 10 HOMILY

God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

God so loved the world....

The night of the Easter Vigil begins with the light of the Easter Candle flickering and then giving its heat and light to the next candles, which then multiply, warm and light up the church, whether cathedral or country church. In the *Exsultet* that follows, that song of Easter Praise, we find the words: “O happy fault of Adam, which merited for us so great a Redeemer.” *O Felix culpa*. The Good News was not about the fault, but what God did with it! What God did for *that* world! Not for what went right, but for what went wrong. “I have come to call sinners” we are reminded.

Only two days ago, Monday, our Church celebrated the Mystery of the Incarnation, that unique action of the Eternal Council of God ordained that the Eternal Word assume Flesh for that world, as after Mary’s “Yes,” Through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, he assumes human nature as a tiny zygote, an embryo in the most blessed womb of Mary. Nine months later at Christmas he is born!

Only three days ago, Sunday, Holy Mother Church acclaimed Divine Mercy, another mystery, not an actual event, but the eternal characteristic of our God, who sent His Son to us, for us, with us, in us. “Jesus I trust in Thee.”

Only ten days ago, Easter Sunday, Christ burst his three day prison, after descending to the depths of the earth to bring forth those awaiting Redemption. Light dispelled darkness, symbolized by the Easter Candle,

Life conquered Death, and Sin loosened its grip on mankind.

We could go on, Good Friday’s suffering and death, the Cross - that scandal to the Jews and stupidity to the Gentiles – as St Paul would say... The Gift of His Body and Blood....

God so loved the world...

But with an infinite Love that we cannot begin to comprehend, and we lose sight of it, trying to solve our own problems, map out our designs by our own small lights. These words of John’s Gospel are Good Friday’s fruit, the summary of that Infinite Love *that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life*. Thomas, last Sunday’s Gospel reminds us “believed” after seeing and was called blessed; those who believed and have not seen – raw faith pumped into the Church down to us – are blessed.

God so loved the world... And what does that mean for us today? So many either dismiss Him as a commodity or irrelevant on one hand; or, variably, they see Him as a Force that strikes fear to such a degree that it crushes any response in real love, but rather guilt from sin. And though it is true that the only thing we can really give to God that is our own is our sin, He still loves us through the sin. It is the filth that somehow he can transform into spiritual gold, for He takes what is redeemable in it and forges a new creation. If God loves the world, that is, every sinner, uniquely and without condition, then how ought we to love that God who takes our sin from us and transforms us if we let Him? As Irish Dominican Father Anselm Moynihan is quoted in today’s *Magnificat* meditation:

The eyes of God are always on us. God is always looking at us, gazing upon us. But he is not searching for evil. He is searching for

*the reflection of his own **goodness** in us. He made us to his image and likeness. **And he delights to see that image and likeness in us...** He looks to see how He can help us and guide us and bring us deeper into his love. He is the Master, He has his plan and nothing can spoil it... And everything that happens to me personally will work out for my own greater good too – if my own will is good and - if I have the love of God in my own heart.*

St Paul in his Letter to Romans exudes over the power of love: He reminds us that God gave his only Begotten Son in this way: “*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into **fear**, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry “Abba” - Father.*” Christ becomes for us the immediate conduit to the Father, the quenching of our thirst for Him, and we can taste and see how sweet is the Lord! Not how fearful He is!

In fact it is said that we are closest to the Father when we devoutly receive His Son in the Holy Eucharist. We need to continually examine ourselves that we are responding as beloved Friends and not estranged by distractions we make little effort to control; or worse, by indifference and sin. Yet this caution is not given out of fear, but out of respect, out of cherishing the Lord in His sublime gift, given for us once at Calvary and continually in the Eucharist. God does not give anything less than Himself to us, to a *world* that would receive Him.

St Paul continues (Romans 8:28) confidently: “*We know that in all things God works for good with those who love Him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.*” *This does not mean that some are called and some are not. All are called “according to God’s purpose.”* It might take some time to discern a vocation for example, or how a handicapped

person might be of especial help to another in a way someone not handicapped might not.

God so loved the world, that He gave us His only begotten Son - that he surrendered His Eternal Word – temporarily to the hands of those who would mock, blaspheme and kill him.

But also to the rest of the world that would follow in time with its many levels of sin and ungratefulness.

Our response to such love is reflected the responsorial psalm’s verse:

“Glorify the Lord with me, “let us together extol His Name. I sought the Lord and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

Do we *fear* the Lord or do we *cherish* Him like a Friend ?

How do we do this? By reclaiming what we are meant to be, in the Image and Likeness of God, not in a world that throws out God for a big bang, or projects or adventures on what we can be by ourselves (with the help of a computerized compartmentalization). The Image and Likeness reflected in the original account was “walking in friendship with God,” in synch with his eternal law, and getting to know Him day by day. That ruptured in the Genesis story rather abruptly.

There is a beautiful Holy Saturday second reading from the earliest century of Christianity which talks about the arrival of Christ in the lower regions where Adam was awaiting his liberation. It is situated between death and new life, between Calvary and the Resurrection. In the exchange, Christ says “*I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the*

dead... I the Lord took the form of a slave, I whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake I became like a man without help, free among the dead....

See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands, nailed to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

And then he ushers them out of hades into eternity:

The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven.

In the praise of the Easter Candle representing Christ the deacon chants:

O happy fault of Adam (felix culpa) that merited such a great Redeemer.

That is our inheritance, not earthly paradise, but the eternal vision of God. *Eternal Life!*

But as we were reminded on Mercy Sunday, “You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse yourself from this. (to Faustina as recorded in her diaries).

Scripture points to this clearly: that mercy Jesus described as he drew Adam and the millions awaiting Christ’s Resurrection from the waiting place to eternity we too must offer to others. Mercy means sacrifice, looking for the other, to the point of offering oneself as a reflection of the Savior’s life and death.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive others.”

Quite a dangerous bargain, unless we mean it.

Imagine if *God so treated the world that He released His Only Son to get even.*

Where would be our final destiny? How could we ever hope to pay back? Imagine that sort of Dionesian god of revenge, or a God who exacts every morsel of pay back for what is His, or else!

No, Jesus came as a tiny Child, starting as a microscopic embryo, hardly days conceived beyond that Annunciation to when John the Baptist recognized Him and leaped for joy because of his delight – without seeing Him! God’s plan was to send His Son as vulnerable as can be, from birth to death when His hour was determined from all eternity. His birth was hidden, lowly, and yet this Baby magnetized Kings and shepherds about him; drew jealous Herod to hunt Him down over a rage for power protection. At the other end Good Friday’s reading tells us *He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.*

The vulnerable, the unseen, the weakened, these characterize the God who *gave* His only Son. Nor was *giving* just a visit and a return. It was an emptying, like a man becoming a dog or a dog’s flea. But infinitely more demeaning. Even so God yearned to do this *that those who believe might not perish.*

There is a world that looks not only to getting even, but in some cases to trample on others’ dignity and God-given rights in order to get ahead. It is found in industry, competition that goes haywire, and even in family relations like prison lockdowns. Jealousies steps on other’s plans and designs, and in some cases crushes their lives, imagining that they don’t even exist.

Yes, IMAGINE if God sent his only begotten Son to get even? And yet that is often how we look at our lives after sin. We condemn, or we do a number on ourselves that the Lord of Mercy would never think of.

God so loved the world...

Every day some 4000 tiny individuals, miniscule human beings, persons like the Lord who caused John the Baptist to leap for joy are killed by the A word – abortion. Just in our country alone. Some 50,000 around the world. Some would dismiss this as a natural pruning necessity in a world grown too filled with people. But it is not natural – it is in deliberate opposition to that “giving” of Self which God, far from getting even, puts Himself in harms way for us. “Christ our paschal feast is sacrificed.” Every Passover points ahead to this; every Mass looks back to it. Since in most cases these are not seen, they are dismissed as non entities. They are not mourned by the world that refracts through another prism.

As we read further in the Gospel today, and we are warned: *“The light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works may not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.”*

The God who gives that others ***may not perish*** - words which are dearest to Christians, because the inescapable sacrificial element of the Cross and the love of the Will of the Father is at the healthiest and liveliest root of this all generous act. The Cross is the prototype, the very source, nourishment of anyone’s sacrificial imitation, however heroic.

God so loved the world.... not to condemn the world... but that the world might be save through Him. This essential component of true Christian identification, summaries our Creed, and our Mission. We cannot shrink from being Lightbearers, even when it means shedding that Light on others who would rather remain – perhaps quite indifferent – in darkness. We don’t have to assess consciences. That is up to God. He forbids us to do that anyway. But he wants us to help others see the light that may at first appear as a nuisance, just as the morning sun might initially “disturb” someone who would rather sleep.

“For everyone who lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.” We are responsible to bring others to the light, to rid the culture, one by one of the darkness of Choice, when that Choice hides the bloody sacrifice of a baby in a Planned Parenthood facility or a hospital, which ironically kills the unborn, so-called unwanted humans, yet on another wing others scurry to keep a new-born baby alive.

To believe in the only-begotten Son, to believe in Jesus Christ, is more than stating that He is alive. More than Thomas’ putting his fingers into Christ’s wounds, nor even our proclaiming along with Him, “My Lord and my God.” The light must be contagious, as symbolized in the Paschal Candle’s source flame catching on to the other candles we help light throughout the dark Church as we threshold into Easter.

Whoever lives the truth comes to the Light, works that may be clearly seen as done by God. It is our responsibility to be light to the world, His light, not our version of it through a distorted or cowardly prism. We need to change the culture from darkness to light,

from death to life, from evil to good, even as we reflect on these words of St John.

It's about social justice for all, and all social justice begins in the womb. Just as our redemption began there as well. The solace and hope of these most familiar and cited words repeated for us in today's liturgy should also remind us that God will forgive any sin whatsoever from the past of anyone's life, if he or she is disposed to receive God's mercy, O Lord you will not reject. We pray for those who have been captive to the dark lie of abortion, as if it helps mothers and fathers involved in that sin. Letting God be the God of mercy, return to the treasure house of graces in the Sacrament of Confession and find again how sweet the Lord is. He is Light and Life to all who turn to Him, that those He heals may become wounded healers, that others may not perish, and themselves be healed. *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*

We need to cherish and enter into the hope that God's mercy exudes in us, to make it contagious, and set the world afire with the works to the poor, handicapped, suffering, needy, born and unborn, especially the poorest as our good Holy Father Francis is showing us through life-long action.

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