

Knights of Columbus Board Meeting 2015

Introduction

Pope Francis often urges us to bring the Good News to the margins of society: to those who are poor, sick, homeless, or imprisoned, to victims of natural disasters, and to those who are ostracized. In the same vein, he speaks out against what he calls the “throw-away culture” – the tendency of secular society to discard the vulnerable who are not deemed useful, productive, or attractive, especially the unborn, the elderly, and the chronically ill. The culture of death says to such people, “Your life is not worth living.”

Likewise, Pope Benedict reminded us of the three inseparable elements to the Church’s mission: the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the Sacraments, and service to the poor and the vulnerable. Although the styles of Pope Francis and Pope Benedict are very different, they are one in their love for the poor; they are one in speaking for them with the prophetic voice of Christ himself.

And the fact remains, anyone who is a serious Catholic sooner or later must grapple with the mystery of human suffering – not in the abstract but in the flesh and blood of our human existence. This is certainly true of the Knights of Columbus. Our first principle, charity, puts us squarely in the path of human suffering, whether it is the victims of 9/11, Katrina, and the earthquake in Haiti, or disabled veterans, or the participants in Special Olympics, and the unborn, or a local family in a parish that needs a helping hand because of illness, unemployment, or a house fire.

Reading from the Book of Job

With all this in mind, I’d like to spend a moment reflecting with you on the reading from the Book of Job, before moving on to the Gospel. And to tell you the truth, Job is not my favorite book in the Bible. It’s like watching a man’s life unravel in slow motion. Job heretofore had been a prosperous man surrounded by a loving family. Truly he does not know what to make of his cascading misfortunes nor do his friends offer him much in the way of wise advice. Even Job’s wife seems to turn on him in his misery. What’s more, scholars say that the verses at the end of the Book of Job,

verses that offer a glimmer of hope, were added later – they are a gloss on the text. Try as I might, I can't forget that little piece of scholarship.

So some years ago, I realized I ought to make my peace with the Book of Job. And I did so when it finally dawned on me that Job has to be understood against total landscape of Scripture. When read in the context of God's loving plan for the salvation of the world, Job stands as a symbol for the suffering humanity that Christ came to redeem. Job sums up not only our sufferings but also our questions about suffering and death, questions that render us an enigma to ourselves.

Job Meets Jesus

With that in mind, let us now turn to today's Gospel passage from Mark's Gospel, a short passage that is packed with the enigma of human suffering. We find ourselves inside the house of Simon Peter where his mother-in-law lay deathly ill, in the grip of a fever. Whereas, in his sufferings, Job could only cry out and question God, we notice how readily the apostles bring this situation to Jesus' attention. They do not hesitate because they are confident he will do something for her. Jesus does not disappoint. St. Mark literally says that Jesus "raised up" Simon Peter's mother-in-law, using a word that foretells the Lord's resurrection. Once cured, Simon's mother-in-law does not pause to revel in her good fortune. No, she does what every one of us Christians should do to express our thanks to God: she gets up and waits on everyone else, that is to say, she serves them.

How important that we bring our needs to Jesus, and not just our own, but those of relatives, friends, co-workers, and fellow Knights and their families. No less than the apostles, we should be confident in his love. And as we experience the touch of Jesus' healing love in our lives, when we are raised up from our sinfulness and misery, we should promptly express our thanks by serving the needs of others.

But let's now proceed a bit further in today's Gospel passage. After Simon Peter's mother-in-law is cured, the scene changes. We move from the inside of the house to the outside. Mark tell us it was evening, after sunset; the Sabbath was over, and the whole town had gathered outside the door of Simon Peter's house. It was as though the whole of suffering humanity were represented there: those who were sick with various diseases and those possessed by demons. The people had come looking for

One who could tell them with authority that sin, suffering, drudgery, and death do not have the last word in our lives. At the door of Simon's house, Job meets Jesus, and this against the day when Job would meet Jesus again, this time definitively, outside the door of the empty tomb. Here we glimpse the deepest roots of the Church's mandate to serve the poor and needy with that love which exceeds every other love.

"Everyone Is Looking for You"

The scene in today's short Gospel passage changes one more time. Jesus wakes the dawn and goes off to a deserted place to pray. If ever we doubted our need for prayer, let us ponder in our hearts the image of the Christ absorbed in prayer.

Yet it falls to Simon Peter, the leader of the apostles, to interrupt Jesus' prayer. And he does so with words that should also be etched on our hearts. Speaking to Jesus, Simon Peter said, "Everyone is looking for you." Then and now, everyone is looking for Jesus. Really? Were the Pharisees and Sadducees really looking for Jesus except to harm him? In our day, are secularists and atheists really looking for Jesus? Are people who are self-absorbed and indifferent looking for Jesus? How about fallen away Catholics? Are they looking for Him?

Friends, the mainspring of evangelization is wound only when we answer a resounding "yes" to the question of whether or not "everyone is indeed looking for Jesus." Think of it this way: We know we are called to engage in the new evangelization. And we confess Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God, the only Savior. Yet that is not enough to make us the Lord's witnesses, his evangelizers. We must not only believe in Jesus; we must also believe deep down that every human life, including our own, is a question to which the Lord Jesus Christ is the answer. We must also believe that only his love sheds light on the enigma of suffering; only his infinite love answers the deepest longings of the human heart. Yes, whether they know it or not, our contemporaries are looking for Jesus. And if we do not believe they are deep down looking for Jesus, we will be half-hearted witnesses who are always hedging our bets, and unwilling to leave our comfort zones, as Pope Francis says.

Thus do we say with St. Paul: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" It is not

only our obligation but also our joy to bear witness to the Person of Christ, for whom Job, that is to say, suffering humanity, is searching. May we bear witness to the joy of the Gospel so that we may have some share in it! Vivat Jesus!