

2nd Sunday
1/17/2021

AN EMBODIED FAITH

Christianity is an embodied religion. We just finished celebrating the Christmas season when we remember the embodiment, the enfleshment of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born with a human body, like us in all things but sin. Jesus suffered, died and eventually rose with a body. Here in the Eucharist he gives himself—body, blood, soul and divinity to us under the form of bread and wine. St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the human body isn't for immorality but for the Lord and that we are called to share in Jesus' new life in our own resurrection. St. Paul speaks of the Church as the body of Christ. We are members of Christ, members of each other and our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

So what does all this mean? It means that how we treat our bodies is important. It means that how we treat the bodies of others is important. To speak of the respect due the human body is really to speak of the respect due to the human person because we are body and soul and the two are intrinsically connected which is a fancy way of saying they form a unity. It means morality is important. Morality is how we live our faith. It's the song we sing with our lives. Morality makes us more human not less human, more free not less free.

There is value in the human person which is made in the image and likeness of God. That doesn't mean that God has ten fingers but rather that like God we have the ability to think, to know and to reason. Then on a much deeper level it means we have the capacity to make a gift of ourselves to others, which is to say, we have the ability to love. And to really and truly love God and neighbor, is to be godlike, it is to be holy. The human person has a calling and a destiny. Every human person is a wonder, a mystery and a gift with a particular mission, a calling.

In the first reading, the boy Samuel hears God but doesn't understand until someone, in this case Eli the priest, helps him. Samuel opens himself up, you could say he gifts himself to the call, he accepts the call despite the challenges it would bring him. In the gospel John the Baptist is fulfilling his mission to make Jesus known. Andrew and then Peter hear a call to follow Jesus and they respond.

When we see the value and dignity of the human person and the calling, the vocation, each person has, we see what is right. We see what's right about the human person; what's right about human life. When we clearly see what's right and what's good, we can more easily recognize what violates this gift; we see more clearly what's wrong and *why* it's wrong.

Now there are many attacks on the goodness of this gift but this coming week we're reminded of two particular assaults on the dignity of the human person. With the King holiday on Monday, we're reminded of the evil of racism. Rightly called the original sin on the American soul, racism functions like cataracts, spiritual cataracts that block our vision of who someone really is. It can even drown out the voice of God. Racism concentrates on *what* a person is rather than on *who* a person is.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church citing the Second Vatican Council notes: *The equality of people rests on their dignity as persons and that every form of discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of race must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.* #1935 –*Curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.* Despite progress, we have a lot of curbing and eradicating to do if we want to match up with God's design. The struggle against racism isn't a matter of imposing religious beliefs on others. It's a matter of civil rights and ultimately, human rights.

And then on Friday, with the anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade decision reminds us of another stain on the American soul with the evil of abortion. Among Dr. King's many eloquent remarks is that, *a threat to freedom anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere.* So too, we can say, *a threat to life anywhere is a threat to life everywhere.* Destruction of pre-born human life, like racism is a great evil. It all contributes to what St. John Paul II called, a culture of death; a culture that looks at life as a commodity and not as a gift from God; a culture that looks to death as a solution.

It is what Pope Francis calls a throwaway culture and as he has insightfully noted, *It is not "progressive" to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life.* The unborn are poor and literally have no voice, no clothes and no legal rights. This assault on pre-born life is also something to be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. To stand up for life, particularly the unborn, isn't a matter of imposing our religious beliefs on others, it's not trying to outlaw restaurants from

serving meat on Ash Wednesday, but rather it's a matter of civil rights and ultimately a matter of human rights.

The victims of this disrespect of human life aren't limited to the unborn or to others who have lost their lives. So often people were in situations where they feel trapped without support and without alternatives. Mothers, fathers and others can come to regret what has happened. Jesus came to bring healing and the mission of the Church is to continue Jesus' healing work for everyone. God's love is greater than *any* sin and God's forgiveness and healing waits for us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Both racial prejudice and disrespect of human life have a common root and that is fear. It's fear of the other. Fear that in both instances can turn violent and even deadly. The day I was ordained a priest the Bishop told us, *May your trust be stronger than fear*. St. John reminds us that, *Perfect love casts out fear*. As important and as essential legislation is, in both of these cases, it also involves education, assistance, prayer and an opening of our hearts. It involves a Culture of life. A culture that values, respects and protects all human life from the first moment of conception to the last moment of natural death; from womb to tomb and every point in between whether it be the unborn, the disabled, the terminally ill, even those on death row or anyone else. It involves what St. John Paul II called, *being unconditionally pro-life*.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we celebrate the gift of life. As Jesus gives himself to us in his word and under the form of bread and wine, we seek to follow him with lives of intentional faith at the service of life.

Our embodied, enfolded faith teaches us what's right about the dignity of the human person. Our faith teaches us that what we do with our bodies and the bodies of others is important and that we have a calling, a mission in this life. Our faith teaches us about what is right regarding the mystery, the gift and the value of human life; that it is a gift to ourselves, a gift to others, a gift from God and ultimately a gift we make to God.