

Sunday, 26 Aug 2018, 21st In Ordinary Time

One Sunday morning, the priest noticed little Alex standing in the front of the church staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names with small USA flags mounted on either side of it.

The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the priest walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly, Good morning Alex.”

“Good morning, Father.”, he replied, still focusing on the plaque. “Father, what is this?” he asked the priest.

The priest said, “Well son, it’s a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.”

Somberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex’s voice barely audible and trembling with fear asked, “Which service, the 8:00 or the 10:00?”

Moses led the people across the desert to escape Egypt. On the journey he disobeyed one of God’s commands. As a result, God told him he would never cross over the river into the promised land. He could stand on a mountain and look across, but that was all. As a result, Moses picked Joshua to lead the people across the river into the promised land. In our first reading today, Joshua has grown old and is dying. But he is worried. He wonders if when he is gone, the people will still worship the one true God. So he calls a meeting of all the people at Shechem. The people have all settled in the lands God gave the tribes when they entered the promised land. Shechem is north of Jerusalem and is centrally located for all the people. It is also the place where Abraham first spoke with God and the place where his grandson, Jacob, later to be named Isaac, buried his Mesopotamian idols in order to fully commit to the God of his father and grandfather.

Joshua asks the people, “Aare you going to serve the one true God that we worshipped before we crossed the river or are you going to worship the idols of the Amorites who lived here before us. In other words, are you going to stay faithful to the faith or are you going to worship the idols of the culture around you - In our day, celebrities, sports, fad and fashions that go against what God has asked of us. He tells the people, No matter what, me and my household we will serve the one true God. And the people agree that they will too. So Joshua can rest in peace.

Our second reading, from St. Paul, is not very popular in today’s world because of one word. But we have a different understanding of that word than St. Paul was using. It is always dangerous and unjust to judge the past without knowing the context, the culture and the circumstances of that time and place. To understand what St. Paul is talking about we need to go back to first century Greece culture. We could incorporate the philosophy of the time, but not today.

During St. Paul's time in the Greek world, the wife had control of everything – the house, the slaves, the money, the running of the household, the keys to the front door. She could lord it over her husband. Men, on the other hand, were always at the gym, working on their bodies to try and have the most perfect one possible. In Greek philosophy, Men had the ultimate perfect bodies. Women were considered imperfect men. If you look at the statues of the time you can see the emphasis they put on the male body. Also, the men were at schools and symposiums educating their minds. As a result, the wife could lock the husband out of the house making him sleep on the street and even not feed him, if he made her mad that morning, or she “heard” that he had been seen with another woman or any of several reasons.

St. Paul was telling the wives to subordinate, to bring themselves down to their husband's level. He was telling the men to love their wives as they loved their own bodies. In other words, bring your wives up to your level. These levels were all in their minds because of the culture. So St. Paul was saying there should be unity, not division in marriage and like marriage there should be no division in the Church. This passage is about living the life of a Christian, not being divided but unified. A brain cannot function without a heart and a heart cannot function without a brain. Each needs the other to survive and properly function. Without Christ, the head, there is no body, the Church.

Which leads us to the Gospel today. Today we are on the last part of the Gospel of John, chapter 6. The first paragraph we read at the end of last Sunday's gospel. Last Sunday, Jesus told his disciples they needed to gnaw on his flesh and slurp his blood with gusto. For a people who had nothing to do with blood, this was horrible. They couldn't all take it. They told Jesus he didn't know what he was talking about. “Yeah, we saw you heal the sick, make the lame walk, make the blind see, make the deaf hear and cure leprosy, but you don't know what you are talking about. I know more than you. I'm leaving.” And they walked away. Jesus must have been hurting bad. But he didn't say, “Oh come back I was just speaking symbolically.” No he stood by what he said. The Eucharist has been a point of division through- out the history of the Church. And still is today. The last poll found that 70% of Catholics believe the Body and Blood received at Mass is symbolical. Most say that because they cannot see the changes or taste the changes. Once again people are telling Jesus he doesn't know what he is talking about. And yet, some stayed, including the 12 Apostles.

Where does this division come from – it comes from pride. Pride is the basis of all sin. We tell God he's wrong. We disagree with the Church. We tell the Body of Christ here on earth it doesn't know what it is talking about. We won't follow this or that teaching. We fail to recognize that the Church is 2000 years old with thousands of minds more intelligent than ours that have helped it and are helping it now. No, we are filled with pride. Humility says, “I don't understand it. I haven't studied in depth, but I believe what the Church teaches and will follow it.” Pride says I know better and I will not follow. The same thing Satan, Lucifer said in heaven and St. Michael and company kick them out of heaven. Satan has it down to a science. He fools

us in thinking it is not pride, but it is. The Devil never sleeps, we do. He's always trying to find out our weakness and trip us up. That is the meaning of Satan, the tripper.

A friend texted me about this mess in Pennsylvania that has been going on for two weeks now. She was so emotional. She didn't know what to pray for. I gave her three things to pray for. I then told her that other dioceses have already been through this. The Diocese of Tucson did it several years ago, so she should not be surprised, but that the reason she was so emotional was that it was her home state. I told her to pray for three things: 1) pray for the victims of these horrible, evil crimes; 2) pray for the new young bishops who have no part in any of this, who are angry and want to make sure this doesn't happen again; 3) pray for the priests who haven't had anything to do with this. We are the representative of the Church to the community and are going to be the ones who take the abuse for the crimes we did not commit. Already, people are screaming at us in public, "Pedophile Priest!" There is no response for that. A priest was in the sacristy, when a man not belonging to the parish barged in, started strangling the priest, slammed him to the ground and started beating his head against the floor, screaming, "This is for the children!"

Make no mistake about this. These crimes are not about lust or sexual gratification. This is about power over another human being. I have power over you and I will show you in the most degrading way possible. This is about extreme pride, extreme narcissism. I am not justifying anything with this explanation. This is about men, ordained to serve the Body of Christ, ordained to serve the faithful, instead serving themselves. And Bishops serving themselves by covering it up. Jesus said if you exalt yourself, you will be humbled. These men tricked people into placing them onto a pedestal and ignoring warning signs.

I have a deacon friend. He goes to the hospital to visit the sick. Many times he goes to a room and talks to the patient. They tell him, "Oh I was a Catholic, but this priest did or said this so I stopped going." My friend then asks them, "Well, what did Jesus do to you?" They have no answer because they focused on a man and not God. We are Catholics to praise and worship Jesus Christ. Not the priest, not the bishop, not the Pope. We are here to be with Jesus first and foremost, not a person, The moment we focus on the priest or bishop or pope, pride enters in – the same pride that says this is not the real Body or Blood of Christ. It is this pride that is causing this division our Church. The pride that causes hurt to all of us.

Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Not a priest, not a bishop, not a pope. Only Jesus Christ. We are followers of Christ, no one else. When we lose sight of that, bad things can happen because we are focusing on pagan idols instead.

God bless you!