



Lenten Day of Recollection

February 18, 2017

Homily, Fr Dominic Borg, ocd

Brothers and sisters; We can Gospel that Peter said to Jesus and also perhaps, like the disciples, this statement. They were terrified Divine, and that is why the Gospel *talking about because they were* nonetheless it switches to the plural But there is something else that perhaps will strike us even more deeply in our lives – *that “then a cloud came and overshadowed them, and from the cloud they heard a voice saying to them ‘This my beloved son, listen to him.’”*



rightly say what we have heard in the Christ *“how good it is for us to be here”*, we do not understand the importance of when they came face to face with the says *“they did not know what they were terrified”*. Though Peter alone spoke, pronoun “they” ... “they were terrified”.

How many times in our lives do we experience a cloud overshadowing us? How many times do we find ourselves passing under the weather, to the extent that we too are confused, thinking that we are alone? Whereas here in the Gospel it said that when this cloud passed by, they discovered that they were alone – them and Jesus. *“They saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus”* only Jesus, it said ... because He is the one who gives us the guarantee *“And lo, I am always with you even to the close of the age.”* And the more we hold this dear to our heart, this assertion, that we are not alone, that He is always with us, that He is the Emmanuel, ‘God is with us’ – that He does care, as we heard today in the Reading of the Morning Prayer from the Book of Deuteronomy, God calling us the “apple” of His eye ... we are precious for Him. We see this also in the Prophet Isaiah, *“you will pass through the fire, and you will not be burned .. you will pass through the water and you will not be drowned, because you are precious in my eyes and I love you”*. This is what the Word of God says to you and to me constantly, because the Word of God as the Divine Revelation Dogmatic Document on Divine Revelation in Vatican II “*Verbum Dei*”, says that “The Holy Bible is a letter of love sent by God the Father to His children who are in exile, telling them how much He loves them.”

To listen is not easy. And the way to listen and hear a voice coming when we are under a cloud is even more difficult because when we are passing under a cloud, even our intellect and our senses shut off. We are in a crisis. We don’t have direction, and that is why we need the Holy Spirit to guide us. That is why we need the Word of God to guide us, as Soren Kirkegard says “The Holy Scriptures are the highway signs. Christ is the way.”

And so when we are in our crisis, when we are under the weather, we hear that we are not alone, that there is a guide, that we have this GPS, “God’s Positioning System” guiding us, then we are sure that we are going to reach the shore. When the Gospel of John says *“When they were in the storm and Jesus Christ came to their rescue, immediately they reached the shore where they were going.”* **“immediately”** – it is a new Exodus - from enslavement to freedom. And this is what we are preparing ourselves for. This is why today we have this day, where we come

together for a few hours of reflection, because, as you know, time flies. And before we know it Easter will be upon us.

Sometimes we wait for Lent, and as soon as Lent arrives, already it is Holy Week. We promised ourselves that this time we are going to be prepared, and it will catch up unexpectedly, in such a way that like the disciples in today's Gospel, they begin to question each other "*What does it mean to be resurrected from the dead?*" What importance does it have for me and for you? Why is it that the Gospel constantly tells us to learn how to die? Because the person who learns how to die before he dies, when he dies, he does not die. As Jesus Christ said "*Those who believe in me, even if they die, yet they will live.*" And "*Those who believe in me will never die.*" Do you believe this? Because they knew how to handle life; they knew that if they want life, they have to die. And when you project life (because when you die, you project life), instead of you killing your husband, or your wife, your children or your neighbour or your boss or your co-worker with your attitude, on the contrary you die for them. When I die for them, I project life, and the life that I project is going to bounce back at me. But, if I do not die, I keep life to myself and I project death, and the death that I threw at life will boomerang back at me.

What does it mean to be raised from the dead? Does it mean to see someone coming out of the grave, out of the tomb "*Lazarus, come out*", and Lazarus comes out of the tomb? Or does it mean what St Paul says? "*One thousand times a day we are sentenced to death, and one thousand times a day we come back to life.*" with the power to conquer death, because He has conquered this for us. That is why, when we look at the cross, for you and for me, it is the beginning of life. It is not death. It is from the cross that comes the strong message "*and I, when I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.*" It is not a coincidence, far from it, it is a "God-incidence" that we can apply the same verse. Either to this cross, or to the throne, to be lifted up on the throne, to be lifted up on the cross. The cross becomes a throne where death is conquered. The more you and I behold the cross, the more we discover the wisdom and the power of God for the salvation of mankind. The more we discover what St Paul has said "*We complete in our body what was lacking in the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Not that something was lacking in the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing was lacking. But we need to see it present here and now today. We need to meet Christians who are ready to die for their enemy, not Christians who kill their friends; Christians who are ready to change their enemy into a friend, not to destroy their enemy. And that is the greatest victory. The greatest victory is not to destroy your enemy, the greatest victory is that the wind that is coming against to dash you into the rock, you embrace it, you arrest it, and you use it to your advantage in getting you far away from the rocks.

To catch it in the windsurfer, and with just a little manoeuvre your windsurfer is moving away from the rocks rather than heading towards shipwreck. That is the greatest victory, to be able to change your enemy into a friend. For example, there is a waiter that is coming toward you in the restaurant, and she is treating you like an object, perhaps because she is tired, or she has met bad customers who were yelling at her – like the last time I went to the pharmacist to pick up my medication and he was trembling ... I asked "is there something wrong" ... he said "about an hour ago a guy was threatening to kill me" I said "what" ... he said "yes, the computer froze, I could not dispense his medication and he said: "are you going to give me the medication or not, because I will come back there and kill you eh" ... and he was very serious. And so, when you

meet that waitress who seems to be in a bad mood, under the weather, and instead of thinking “I am not going to tip her” on the contrary you think “I am going to tip her well”. You tip her well, and you win her over. I assure you that the next time you go to that restaurant you will be treated like a king/queen. She will run to serve you because she will assume that you are going to tip her well again. And that is conquering her. The same it is with our relationship with each other.

Lent comes to teach us how to die to ourselves so that when the time comes we will be able to participate in the death and passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we will be trained to do so. That is why the disciples are asking themselves “What does it mean exactly?” What does he mean? Not to say anything until the Son of Man is risen from the dead. This is exactly what St Paul says when he says “*With fear and trembling, work out your own salvation.*” Be on guard to show to the people, to work it out, to show to the world that we are people who are saved, that we are people who have power over death, that we are people who, not just use the cross as an ornament but as a principle to be lived, because the Cross is not just an ornament to be worn, but it is a principle to be lived.

When we look at the Cross, we discover life not death. That is why the Letter to the Hebrews in the first reading came to you and to me telling us “*Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*” In reality, as Paul tells us “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God.*” The Word of God is life, and because the Word of God is life, we learn how to unfold it as the Psalmist tells us “*The unfolding of your word gives life. It imparts understanding even to the simple.*”

So bearing in mind these sayings, we have to come to the conclusion that faith is seeing the Will of God unfolding in mysterious ways - now with an accident, now with the death of someone we love, now being fired from work ... our God is a God of surprises brothers and sisters. And the more we are able to see Him, the more we can understand what C.S. Lewis has said “Surprised by joy.”, because God is joy. It is a history of salvation. The more we listen to the Word of God, the more we dispose ourselves so that God will instil His joy in us. “These things I have said to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” There will be a joy in dying for the other person.

I will give you a quick example, and conclude with it. When you give charity to someone, and you are generous in giving him charity, automatically you feel spiritual pride. You feel it ... it is an experience, an experience of great joy that for once, without knowing, you succeeded to put the interest of the other person ahead of your own interest. Instead of spending that \$5.00, \$10.00, \$20.00 to have a burger and a coffee for yourself, you preferred that someone else will take it, and you remain hungry. That is the moment when we experience what St Paul has said in his letter to the Philippians “*Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus. He did not look to his own interest, but to the interest of others.*” That is the moment when we stop saying ‘I always look after others.’ “People don’t care about me.” “I always help others. No one helps me.” “When I ask for help, I don’t find it.” “I” “I” “I”.

The basis of our spirituality is “I must decrease. He must increase.” So Lent helps us, brothers and sisters to make space, so that when John the Baptist comes to you and to me as the prophet Elijah, he will indeed prepare us for the coming of the Messiah in our lives. To have an

experience of freedom, because, after all, Easter is the Feast of Our Freedom, the Feast of Our Joy.