

HOM 5th Sunday Lent 2024 B March 17

In last week's Gospel reading (John 3:14), Jesus spoke of being *lifted up*, comparing it to the bronze serpent God told Moses to make and mount on a pole that was lifted up for the Israelites to look at and be healed of the snake bites with which they had been afflicted. A footnote for this in the New American Bible states that the verb used for Jesus being *lifted up* is different from the verb used for the bronze serpent being up lifted and that the former implies glorification, meaning both the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Today we have another statement by Jesus about being lifted up to which Jesus adds "*I will draw everyone to myself*". In the very next verse, the Gospel writer, John, explains that this refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. Verse 33 reads: "*He (Jesus) said this indicating the kind of death he would die.*" The verb for Jesus being lift up used in today's reading (John 12: 33), however, is the same verb used in John 3:14 last week which implies both death and resurrection.

So, our starting point today is this: *Jesus seeks to draw us to Himself in His crucifixion and His resurrection to the glory of the Father's House.* In other words, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are invited – indeed, we have an imperative – we must -- participate in His suffering – His Cross – so that we can be raised with Him to Heaven. Notice also what is stated in our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews: "*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*"

So, in His Human nature, although Jesus was completely sinless, He was not perfected in His sinlessness until He remained obedient to the Father's will unto the Cross of obedience and love. And doing this, He pours out to us the Holy Spirit so that we can join Him in doing the Father's will unto the Cross, and so be perfected in our humanity.

And this has temporal and eternal consequences; it has an effect on us, individually and socially, here and now, and unto eternity. In fact, in the Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes* (nos. 37-38), the pastoral constitution on the Church in the Modern World, it teaches that human progress has become more noticeably a mixture of good and evil, the latter of which has the potential to destroy the human race. It then asks how things can be set right. The answer given is this: "*Christians believe that all human activity...is to find its purification in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ*" and that "*the fundamental law of human perfection, and therefore of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love.*"

That new commandment of love is to LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. It requires us to go to the Cross with Jesus in His self-offering to the Father's will for the life of the world. We do this by way of the Eucharist, in Holy Communion with Jesus. But it has to be done deliberately, freely, without reservation, and formally. Listen to what Pope Benedict XVI had to teach about this in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacrament of Charity* (n. 11):

The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' self-oblation. More than just statically receiving this incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. Jesus draws us into himself. The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces into creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of 'nuclear fission', to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all. (1 Cor 15:28)

What Benedict is stating here is that if enough of the faithful join in Jesus' saving oblation of love, this will increase exponentially to include the whole Church and result in a great outpouring of grace – the Holy Spirit's power of the love – to all the willing when the Church undergoes her final trial unto the Cross.

To join in Jesus saving oblation, with every Holy Communion, we are to offer ourselves to and with Jesus to the Father unto the Cross and Resurrection for our true good and for the true good of every person – beginning with family and friends -- most especially their eternal good, their sanctification and salvation. And then we are to live this out in-between by striving to do, speak, or suffer whatever the Lord asks of us.

Today, speaking the truths of our faith publically can bring legal repercussions and even violent opposition, not to mention more subtle forms of hatred. But keeping in mind that it was for speaking the Truth that Jesus was crucified, and the early Christians were martyred, we should find the determination to do this anyway.

And if proclaiming the truth about human sexuality in the face of same sex marriage and transgenderism was not difficult enough – and if the truth about the God given right to life of every person from conception until natural death in the face of legal abortion and euthanasia was not sufficiently provocative – now we have another moral issue about which we must speak the truth. It's in vitro fertilization – IVF.

If there was ever something that mixed evil with good, it's IVF. The good, of course, is the conception of a child. The evil is that it's done outside the rules God has put in place for conceiving a child which is in marriage within the context of the self-giving love of husband and wife in the marital act. With IVF, there is not only the sin of self-abuse as part of the process, but also the frozen imprisonment and / or the destruction of embryonic human beings.

More embryonic babies are destroyed each year through IVF than through abortion. And there are more than one million embryonic babies in frozen storage just in our country. This poses a true moral dilemma. The only way to handle it morally may be the development of an artificial womb for their pre-natal growth to an artificial birth and their adoption.

IVF became a political issue recently when the Alabama Supreme Court, based on that state's constitution ruled that all embryos – in any location – inside the womb or outside the womb -- are children with civil rights. That was a courageous 8-1 decision by the Court – in the state, by the way, where EWTN was founded and is based -- and the ruling has political leaders lining up on both sides of it, mostly against it.

Our Church must speak out in favor of the lives of the embryonic babies, but also against IVF as an immoral – i.e., evil -- means for achieving a good end. There are, in fact, good medical means that can be used to assist with attaining pregnancy in marriage. These were developed largely by Dr. Thomas Hilgers who dedicated his life to developing and promoting morally acceptable methods of women's reproductive health care. His methods are taught at two medical schools in our country in conjunction with the St. Paul VI Institute he founded in Creighton, Nebraska. You can check this out on-line. Just type in NaPro Technology. That's N-A-P-R-O Technology.

When the Church, however, through the hierarchy or lay leaders, speaks the truth on matters ranging from abortion pills or abortifacient contraceptives to IVF, the result will be rage among those who despise the Church and even God, albeit secretly for some. The best we can hope for politically is religious freedom to live our faith in the work place, the market place, and public square without threat of fines, bankrupting lawsuits, or imprisonment. The worst case of response to publically speaking the truths of our faith – is violent, lawless persecution.

Right now Church leaders seem to speak rather loudly in support of popular issues like Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Open Borders, and even the Blessing of Same Sex couples, and against Racism. But when it comes to the highly controversial issues, they are sometimes mute or speak very softly.

As a pastor or priest said recently at a clergy gathering, if we spoke the truth like we should, it would bring on the crucifixion of Christians.

I agree with that statement. But we must speak the truth like we should anyway.

Brothers and sisters, may we do this as we enter fully into the saving oblation of Jesus Christ, for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life - - the only One who can take us into the Father House -- the new heavens and the new earth -- in oneness with Himself. May we offer ourselves to and with Jesus for the life of the world – the salvation of all the willing. I invite you to join me in this by praying these words silently and sincerely with every Holy Communion and striving to live them out in between: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.