

Sixth Sunday of Easter: Authentic Life

Have you ever gone to a museum of contemporary modern art, like the museum of that very name in Chicago, or the Whitney Museum in New York? Every three or four years, I'll have some time in a city and decide to kill an hour in one of these museums. I always regret it. When I leave, I usually have the feeling that I didn't just kill an hour, I bludgeoned it to death. So many of the exhibits are black, dismal, and hopeless. I leave the museum asking myself, "Why are these people so negative? How is it that they cannot see anything worthwhile in the world around them?"

I have to ask myself similar questions when I come upon people mired in the Goth culture or even some of those into Heavy Metal. Why do they exalt the macabre? Why do they see life as dark and morbid? Is it simply to be different from everyone else? Probably. But they also may be externalizing a fear that so many people have, the fear that life is too difficult to imagine. All this negativity, including that expressed by so many contemporary artists, is not all that new at all. The negativity expresses the reality of those who live without hope. For them life is frustrating. For them, the best that can be hoped for is here and now. "Life is imperfect. We are all imperfect," they would point out. Their basic attitude is paraphrased by that nasty saying, "Life is difficult, and then we die."

We are still suffering from the pandemic of 2020-2022. One of the saddest results of the pandemic is that so many people have decided that the present is terrible at its best. During the lock-down, many people sought reality on their computer and tablet screens. People are still seeking reality in unreal cyberspace. It is not a surprise that so many people are now living lives mired in negativity.

This should not be the attitude of the Christian. Even when faced with the most horrible challenges the world can offer, the Christian is not hopeless. Christians are counter cultural. We do not embrace the malaise of a meaningless life. In the second reading for this Sunday, the first pope, St. Peter, speaks about the reason for our hope. Our hope is in Jesus Christ who cares for each of us personally, who understands our struggles better than we understand them, and who brings joy and peace to our lives even when life becomes difficult.

With all the negativity that surrounds us, how do we keep our Christian focus? We do this by dedicating ourselves to truth. That is what the Gospel reading tells us. Usually when we think about truth, we consider it as simply not telling a lie. Well, that is not sufficient. Truth is more than the opposite of saying something that is false. Truth is found in the way we live. Truth gives us the ability to live an authentic life. When we focus in on ourselves, we are living a lie. When we focus on sacrificial love, we are living a genuine, true life. When we make self gratification the goal of our lives, we are living a lie, the lie that we can make ourselves happy. When we commit ourselves to the Lord, we are living the profound Truth that happiness comes from Him alone.

Today's readings speak about joy. There is the joy that new Christians in Samaria had after they were baptized by Philip. There is the joy that St. Peter tells us is the reason for our hope. There is the joy that Jesus says comes from the Love of the Father.

We Christians are truly eternal optimists. We may be dying of cancer, we may be in difficult family situations, strained relationships, financially hurting, what have you, but no matter what the situation, we know that if we are true to Christ, He will always be the source of our joy.

We live for the Lord. We die for the Lord. He is the reason for our hope.

That is authentic Christian life.