

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Are You Not Aware?

Today I would like to focus in on the second reading, from the sixth chapter of *St. Paul's Letter to the Romans*. This reading contains the first words of the New Testament during the Solemn Easter Vigil. After the Paschal Candle is brought in and the Light of Christ is proclaimed, we have the solemn singing of the Exultet. Then the readings begin. There are seven readings from the Old Testament. We hear about creation, about Abraham, about the crossing of the Red Sea, and then four readings from the prophets. After this there is the solemn singing of the Gloria and the opening prayer of the Easter Season. Then a lector proclaims,

"Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

The reading emphasizes our role in the Easter Mystery. We are not just observers of the historical event of the Lord's death and resurrection. We are participants. Our baptism is a baptism into his death. The water poured over us signifies a death to the world without God. As Christ rose from the dead, we, at our baptism, embrace a new life, His Life.

The resurrection of the Lord has changed everything for us. Through Baptism we have a spiritual life. Our physical lives are temporary. We all die. But our spiritual life, that is eternal. It cannot be taken from us. It can only be surrendered by us. Our lives have been transformed. We are intimately united to Jesus Christ.

We need to keep this in mind when we find ourselves getting all caught up in the events taking place around us. We have to view everything from the perspective of Jesus Christ. We need to ask ourselves, "How can we transform the mundane events of the world into celebrations of the Lord's love?"

Our relationship to the Lord must be the center and the foundation of all the relationships of our lives. Next to it, all other relationships are secondary, even those relationships that carry the greatest impact in our lives. Jesus Christ must be the center and goal of these relationships. If He is not, then even our most cherished relationships are destructive instead of life giving. This is a hard concept. It is what Jesus is saying in the Gospel reading, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* The love we experience in our families has to reflect the deep love we have for our Lord. If it does not, then that love is not real love. Any love that does not make Jesus Christ present, is not true love. It ultimately is a selfish love. So what Jesus is saying in that difficult passage is that he must be at the center of our love, our love for our parents, our love for our children, the love of husbands and wives, and our love for each other.

Furthermore, the love of Jesus Christ is sacrificial love. It is a love that puts the other before the self. If we do not love that way, then we are really not loving at all, but are taking for ourselves. But when we put others before ourselves, then the Presence of Christ becomes real in our world.

It is easy for us to slip into selfishness. The sacrament of penance protects us from falling into our own self-centeredness. People prepare for confession by asking themselves where they have turned away from God in serious matters or, usually, where they see themselves starting to slip away from God by putting themselves before their spouse or their children. When I participate in a confession like this, mediating God's forgiveness, I know that there is a great marriage and a great family here. The husband, wife, mother or father, or child for that matter, realizes that selfishness is an offence against the love that makes the relationship a relationship with Jesus Christ. He or she is seeking not only forgiveness, but the strength to keep Christ as the center of their love. They are worthy of Him.

Perhaps today's Gospel passage was initially directed to those whose faith in Jesus Christ would be attacked by members of his or her own families. Certainly, there are many great martyrs who had to choose Christ over their families. Young girls like St. Agnes and St. Lucy, St. Perpetua and St. Felicity, St. Agatha and St. Cecilia and St. Anastasia were forced to choose between their families and living a Christian life. There are many young men who had to make the same choice, notably Blessed Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio, and St. Pancras, St. Gabriel of Poland, St. Crescentius of Rome, Blessed Andrew Phu Yen of Vietnam. They accepted the choice of Jesus Christ, even though they had to sacrifice their families and their very lives. Jesus tells them, and us for that matter, "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

What is the *raison d'être* for your life, for my life? What is the reason for the living of your life, of my life? What is the reason for being of your life, of my life? What motivates us? What give meaning to our lives?

The answer to these and all ontological questions, all questions of being, is Jesus Christ.

Are **we** not aware of what happened at our baptism and what continues to happen as we live the Christian life? We are transformed by the Love of God.