

Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: The God of Beginnings

A little while ago I spoke with a lady from another parish who was extremely negative regarding the world. I guess keeping a news channel on all day, interspersed with talk shows can make anyone negative. When you add to this the personal troubles that are part of all our lives, perhaps the world might appear to be dark. Anyway, this lady went on and on, "The world's going to hell in a hand basket. I don't know why God puts up with us."

Why does God put up with us? Why is it that in the face of the abominations of our society from the exploitation of the weak and helpless, the killing of infants, sex trafficking, the continual wars supported by the industries of the developed countries, why is it that God allows all this to continue?

The readings for today provide the answer. God is a God of Beginnings, not a God of endings. He lets Moses begin anew with the Hebrew people even after they turned to idolatry. Paul tells Timothy in our second reading how he had been a blasphemer, arrogant, and a persecutor of the Lord's presence in the Church. But God began again with him. The gospel reading presents three parables of God's beginning again. Jesus tells about the shepherd who rejoices at finding a lost sheep. He talks about the woman who finds the lost silver piece. He tells about the Father who takes back the lost son.

Jesus relates these parables at a dinner as he sits and eats with tax collectors, common thieves who used the Roman soldiers to help them steal from their own countrymen. The holier-than-thous, the Pharisees and scribes, ask him how he would dare make friends with people like this. Jesus' parables present a simple answer to this question: God has not given up on them or on any of us. The God of beginnings gives us an opportunity to start new.

"But Father, I have really done some low down things. I really bear a deep responsibility for what happened in the disastrous first marriage. I did things when I was young that I am ashamed to even think about. How can God forgive me for my past?" He can forgive us because He wants to forgive us and because, well, He is God. He can do all things. God forgives you and me because he loves you and me. When someone loves someone, he or she is willing to give the offending person a chance to begin again. God can and does forgive you and me because he is the God of beginnings who sees all we can be, not just all we could have been.

And God values the results of new beginnings.

In 1958, before many of you were born, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was elected Pope. He served for only five years, but he transformed the world with his openness to God's love. Politically, he was most probably elected to keep the status quo in the Church. But God used him to renew the Church. He started out with a bang, not taking the name Pius, as the two popes before him, but taking a new name, one that

had not been used for centuries, John. John XXIII had a personal motto that he took with him to the papacy and shared with the rest of the world. His motto was simple: *Now I begin*. He sought forgiveness for the past each day. He renewed his personal life every day. His determination to entrust his life to the God of beginnings result in the transformation of the Church, notably in his calling the Second Vatican Council. His Holiness was indeed a holy man. He is now Pope St. John XXIII. He was canonized at the same time as Pope St. John Paul II.

Sometimes when people are negative, wondering about the world and God's wrath, I ask them to look at our children. They are beautiful in many, many ways. They are the new start the world needs. They are not just our projects, they are God's special people created to transform the world. And the children themselves, by their very being, transform us. Our cooperation with God's plan for them demands that we live the ideals of his Kingdom. How many people return to worship because they want the best for their children. Baptism and First Communion really become times of graced moments for the whole family, They are the occasions of mothers and fathers sincerely reflecting on their own faith lives and allowing God to revitalize their spirituality for their own sakes as well as the sake of their children.

The God of new beginnings is aware of this. He loves us for the revitalization we bring to his Kingdom when the words of Joshua become the guiding principle of our lives, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

So let's not give up on ourselves. We don not have the right to give up on ourselves. Yes, we need to seek forgiveness over and over. Yes, we are human beings who often make mistakes. But God loves us and is always ready to give us a new beginning. He does this not just for us, but for the effect our new beginning has on our children, and through them on the world.

"Now I begin," Pope St. John XXIII said. Today and everyday is the day for us to begin. Every day is a new day in God's Kingdom.