

26th Sunday: The Name Above All names

This Sunday we are treated to one of the most beautiful passages about Jesus in the entire Bible. It is found in the *Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians*. St. Paul begins by telling the people to be kind, and loving, and merciful to each other. They, we, are to put the interests of others above ourselves. And then he tells us about Jesus. He says that we should have the same attitude in life as Jesus had. He was forever God, but he did not regard this as something to be grasped. Instead He emptied Himself of his divinity. He became a human being. More than this, he became a slave for all of us. And he obeyed His Father for our sakes, even when this obedience led to His death on the cross.

Then we have the Christological hymn:

Because of this God has bestowed on Him the name that is above every other name; so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, both in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.

It is difficult for us to explain our belief in Jesus. He is not just a theory, an intellectual doctrine. He is a living person. We have a personal relationship with Him. We go through our days speaking to Him and listening for Him to speak to us. We know that He is the eternal Son of the Father, the Word of God present from the beginning of creation. But that is not how we relate to Him or He to us. He is our closest friend, our deepest Love. We look at the Cross and are amazed at the extent of His Love for us.

He is God, and yet, He became one of us, more than that, he became a slave for us. A slave serves the needs of his master without considering the impact on his life. Jesus came to serve us. He came to free us from the grasp of materialism. He came to renew the quest for the spiritual within us. He came to restore us to that place in creation that we deserted out of pride and selfishness. We sometimes tell the little children, "Jesus came to open the gates of heaven." That is beautifully concrete, the only way that a little child can understand the world. For us adults we would have to develop this thought into: He came to instill the spiritual within us so that we can be united to the Eternal after our death.

"Be like Him," St. Paul says in the first reading. "Serve others. Stop being selfish. Look at others as more important than yourself." This is difficult. We would like to think that the world revolves around us and our wants. But it does not. The world is the Lord's.

With the Grace of God, we can do the work of God. But this is work, and work is hard. Work takes time and strength. Work means exhausting ourselves to be understanding, in your case, of your husband or wife, your children, your parents. In my case, the people God calls me to serve. Recently, a seminarian said to me that it is

draining to serve as a priest. I told him that it is only draining when you really do the work of the Lord. Then when you say, "this is my Body," it is both Jesus' body and your body that you give to His people. It is really the same for everyone, priests and laymen. Doing the work of the Lord means emptying ourselves.

It also means doing everything we can to stay away from all that could hurt us. It takes work to control that temper. It takes work to be spiritual in our homes. It takes work to turn a house into a place of prayer, a little Church. This is the work of Jesus, who humbled Himself for others, for us.

We are called to work in the Father's vineyard. The vineyard is your house and my house. The vineyard is your life and my life. The vineyard is that place where others are reaching out to us, seeking the love of Christ in us. They long for Jesus. And they can find Him. They can find Him within us. Within us as Church and within us as individuals.

The famous English author G. K. Chesterton wrote that atheists were balanced on the very edge of belief, but it is belief in almost anything. Some people reject Jesus and then substitute His presence with superstition. They say that they do not believe in God and certainly not in the concept that He could love us so much as to send us His Son, but then they call the shaman in to investigate their house for bad juju.

And to our discredit, in our politically correct world, we reinforce their emptiness by giving credibility to this mumbo jumbo. We say, "Isn't the spirituality of native Americans wonderful? Isn't there great truth in the Animism of the aborigines?" And so forth. Yes there is truth throughout the universe, but how dare we equate pagan practices with the Life and Death of Jesus the Christ?! Maybe we lack the courage to do that which we were created to do: lead others to Jesus.

But when we do have that courage, when others can come to a deeper understanding of the extent of the Love God has for us and for them, then they will be open to this love, open to Jesus. That is the mission of Christianity, the mission of evangelization.

What is the reality of Jesus in your lives, in my life? How real is He to you? Can we all realize that through the Grace of God, Jesus' presence is stronger and His Life is more meaningful now than ever before? This is not a matter of feeling, it is a matter of recognizing reality. Everything is for Jesus. Everything that matters in the world flows from Him and leads to Him.

St. Paul put it so beautifully in those closing words of today's second reading;

God has bestowed on Him the name that is above every other name; so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, both in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.

He is ours. And we are His. We pray today for the courage to serve the Father as He served Him, emptying ourselves of our selfishness, humbling ourselves before our God, loving Him until the day that we are totally united to our Tremendous Lover.