

10th Sunday of the Year, Year C

The theme of today's readings is life. In the Gospel Jesus comes upon a funeral procession and a mother weeping for her only son. Moved with compassion, Jesus restores the boy to life and to his mother. In the First Reading we read from the legends about the prophet Elijah how he did something similar. For Luke, it is Jesus who brings to its fulfillment the earlier messages of the prophets. If we want life, it is to Jesus that we should look. The Entrance Antiphon, which announces the theme for the Mass reads: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the defender of my life.'

The Communion Antiphon reminds us that to live we must be freed from whatever it is that is holding us back, and it is this aspect that I would like to reflect on with you. Jesus said he came that we might 'live and live to the full preventing us from living to the full (John 10:10) and in the Prayer over the Gifts we are reminded of the truth that living to the full means 'growing in Christian love'. Christian love is a very special form of love. It is not something we can acquire by our own efforts, though it does require our willing cooperation. Christian love is precisely the love of the Heart of Jesus, which he pours into our hearts with the gift of his Spirit.

The question we might ask ourselves is: What do I have to let go of in order to really live and live to the full? To answer this question our focus is not to be on what we decide to let go. In fact it is frequently our own will that we need to renounce. What matters is that when God calls us to a more intimate love, we are ready to let go whatever it is that is holding us back from responding.

Letting go is different for each person. We are made in God's 'image and likeness'(Genesis 1:26). God is communion in love and God's will is that we share in the communion enjoyed by Jesus, who invites us: 'Come to me'(Matthew 11:28), and who prays: 'May they be one in us, Father, as you are in me and I am in you'(John 17:21). God gives us many things in love, but we must not confuse the gift with the Giver and we should not become so attached to God's gifts that we continue to hold them tightly when God is asking us to let them go in order to grow into closer communion. How can we embrace God with open arms while refusing to loosen our hold on what is less than God? We know the difference between giving gifts and giving ourselves. We also know that we can focus on another's gift and miss out on a deepening of our communion with the one giving the gift. It is no different with our relationship with God.

God knows what each person needs to let go in order to draw close to Jesus and so enjoy divine communion. For the rich young man it was material possessions. For the scribes it was pride in their learning. For some it was their negative sense of themselves, and for others their inflated ego. Essential to detachment is that we are not the ones to decide. We must wait on the inspiration of grace. The goal is to do God's will. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he was not thinking of leaving the boat. He was wanting to go to Jesus, and so he prayed: 'If it is you, tell me to come to you across the water'. It was only when Jesus called him that he knew that he could leave the boat and, keeping his eyes on Jesus, walk towards him (Matthew 14:28-31).

It is essential that we keep our eyes on Jesus and that we follow his call and not turn the focus on ourselves. When the servants in Jesus' parable suggested that they go and dig out the weeds

that were growing in among the wheat, the master told them to leave that to him (Matthew 13:29). We do not have the wisdom to discern wheat from weed, and we might dig out wheat by mistake. Similarly, if we were to take charge of our own detaching we might do ourselves harm. We might even fall into pride, congratulating ourselves on the success of our self-denial. The science of detachment is a science of love. Only God has the wisdom to know what it is that we need to let go, and when we are ready to do so.

God's will is to purify us completely so that we can receive the gift of God's self and live, without distraction, in divine communion. If our offering of self is to be such as to leave God free to do with us what God wills, we must be ready to let go whatever is revealed to us as hindering this communion. This is the denial of self on which Jesus insists: 'If you wish to become my disciple, you must deny yourself' (Matthew 16:24). Jesus goes on to say how important is our real self. He does not want us to deny that, for our real self is beautiful, being created in the image of God. Nothing, not even gaining the whole world, is worth anything if it means forfeiting this self! For this is who we really are.

The self we have to deny is the self that we have built up in order to cope in a confusing world, a self that indulges in make-believe and that can hide behind masks of our own or other people's making, a self that we have developed in reaction to the imperfect love given us by people who are significant to us. We would do well to join with Paul (see Ephesians 3:16) in praying that what grows strong is our 'hidden selves', our real selves. This will grow in proportion to the love that we are open to receive and the love that we are open to give. Our communion with God is crucial. The purpose of detachment is that we might be free to welcome all the love that God is offering us, and be free to make a whole-hearted gift of ourselves in response.

Jesus revealed that our longing for God is a response to God's greater longing for us. Because Jesus offered himself, he entered into perfect communion with his Father. In this he showed us the way.

As a young woman, Mary knew that left to herself there was no way she could carry out the mission revealed to her by God. God was offering her an unprecedented intimacy. He wanted her to conceive the Word-made-flesh. This could only happen if God embraced her and breathed into her God's own creative Spirit. God offered her this special love. God could give it only if she consented. God did not ask her to do anything, but rather to say Yes to welcoming God's gift. Her response was perfect: 'Let what you have said *be done to me*' (Luke 1:38).

To be open to allow God to achieve God's loving purpose in us, we need to hold everything that is not God so reverently that we are willing to let it go the moment God calls us to do so. If our hands are tightly clasped how can we hold them open to receive God's gift? How can we remain free to embrace God when it is God who is being offered to us?

The key is to want only what God wants. However good something might be in itself, we must be ready to let it go if love calls us to do so. We conclude our reflections on detachment with the poem of Saint Teresa of Avila:

Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you
Everything is passing. God alone does not change

Patience obtains everything

The one who clings to God wants for nothing. God alone is enough.