

19th Sunday of the Year, Year C

A good place to look for the mood of the Mass on a particular Sunday is the psalm chosen as a response to the first reading. Today it is psalm 32 according to the liturgical numbering (Psalm 33 in Bibles, which follow the Hebrew numbering). It is an invitation to the assembled community to give expression to its joy in being especially chosen to experience God's intimacy. The first reading, to which it is the response, recalls the miraculous escape of the Hebrews from Egypt and all that God has done for them in caring for them as his chosen people. The psalm focuses on the evidence of God's faithful love in the wonder of creation and in the wonder especially of the human heart which God is continually fashioning as he gazes on us with love. You parents and teachers know about this as you are continually fashioning the hearts of your children. Reflecting on God's wonderful love, the psalmist concludes with a prayer - one that the Church has made her own as the conclusion to the Te Deum - sung as a conclusion to most solemn liturgies: 'May your love be upon us, Lord, as we place all our hope in you.'

The Second Reading takes us right to the heart of the matter. To see God's love acting in the world and in our own lives we need a lot more than our eyes or our logical minds. Much of what we see and experience is anything but loving. Sin, in all its forms, is so crass that it stares us in the face. The wheels of our mind can become bogged in it and our hearts can be so wounded by it that we can't feel anything else. To see the constant caring love of God we need faith. We are not being asked to make-believe, for God's love is there to be seen. But it did not stop the crucifixion and it does not stop evil. God is there ever inviting us into our own hearts and into the hearts of others, ever forgiving, guiding, holding, healing and asking us to place our hand in his and walk in the darkness, with love and towards love. Abraham walked in faith, as did his wife Sarah. They were even willing to let go their only son, the son of the promise, when they thought God was asking this of them. As it turned out God was not asking this of them and God's promise to them was fulfilled through Isaac - but at the time this was not something they could see. They had to look beyond the obvious. They had to trust. We are called to do the same. This is beautifully expressed in a hymn composed in honour of Saint Joachim and Anne, patrons of all grand-parents:

Lord God, we give you thanks for all your saints
who sought the trackless footprints of your feet
Who took into their own a hand unseen
and heard a voice whose silence was complete.
Blest Trinity, may yours be endless praise
for all who lived so humbly in your sight.
Your holy ones who walked dark ways in faith
now share the joy of your unfailing light.

James McAuley could write as he was dying of cancer in 1976:

I know that faith is like a root that's tough, inert and old;
yet it can send up its green shoot and flower against the cold.
I know there is a grace that flows when all the springs run dry;
it wells up to renew the rose and lift the cedars high'.

So Jesus tells us in today's gospel not to put our trust in things that cannot give life to our hearts. Sure, we need material things and it would be irresponsible not to provide them for our own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those whom we love and who are dependent upon us. But, says Jesus, don't let these things possess you. Don't get things out of proportion. Don't get trapped in possessions or reputation or appearances. We are made by love and we are made for love. Everything must be in view of love. Our bodies need love, our hearts need love, our minds need love. But more than all else our souls need love. He tells us to make sure our souls are awake, alert for the approach of the one for whom our souls are longing. What a tragedy it would be to be so preoccupied with everything else, however important, and let our souls starve, neglecting our deepest longings. In Saint Augustine's famous words: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless till it rests in you.'

Faith keeps our hearts and our souls tuned to God. When we notice Jesus' approach, when we hear him knocking, if we open the door he will come in and sit us down and serve us, for his deepest desire is our happiness. Once when Peter felt totally lost and he asked Jesus what to do, Jesus said to him: 'Have faith in God'(Mark 11:22). Peter remembered these words and in a letter written from Rome when his own life was about to be taken from him, he said to his community: 'It is through Jesus that you have come to place your trust in God, for it was God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory. So now your faith and your hope are set on God'(1Peter 1:21). 'May your love be upon us O Lord, as we place all our hope in you'

Jesus makes the same point in today's Gospel. He reminds us that the only real treasure is the treasure for which our heart longs and it comes from heaven, from God. So let us be alert, let our heart be awake for the whisper of God's Spirit. Let us fill our lungs with God's breath. Our deepest longing, says Jesus, is to share the love banquet that Jesus enjoys with his Father. That is exactly what God wants to share with us. He is always coming to us, knocking gently on the door of our soul. If we are listening for his knock and open our hearts to him, he promises to come in and eat with us.

We have responded to his coming by being here at Mass this morning. As we touch our deep hunger and thirst, let us prepare for the wonderful moment of communion when the risen Jesus will come into our souls and share with us the love-communion that he has with his Father and which will be our life for all eternity in heaven. This is the most sacred encounter we can have here on earth and we are never closer to those we love, whether living or dead, than when we are sharing this intimate communion with Jesus.