

Homily - 12th Sunday of the Year C

Happy Father's Day! A couple of weekends ago, we celebrated the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded us, referring to the Mass, "Do this in memory of me." Why is the Eucharist the source and summit of our Christian lives? Why is the Paschal Mystery of the Suffering, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus the pivotal mystery in our Christian celebration? Today's liturgical readings provide useful insights. Psychologists have a concept known as "The Impact Theory." According to this theory, people are most likely to remember things that made a deep impression on them than things that did not.

Today, in America, "September 11, 2001" is arguably the most striking event in recent times. We still see some flashes of the terrible event on Television now and then. How horrific! It was a nightmare. As a response, churches were filled to capacity. We prayed as a people and as a nation. We set up the "September 11" Commission to determine what could have been done to prevent such a tragic incident; also, what could be done to prevent such horrific acts in future. On the whole, we vowed that we will never forget.

Our First Reading (Zech 12: 10-11; 13:1) shows that, for the Israelites at the time of Prophet Jeremiah, their impression event was their colossal defeat in battle "in the plain of Megiddo" (609 BC). Necho II of Egypt had mobilized to fight against the Babylonians. However, his forces needed to pass through the territory of the Kingdom of Judah. Necho II sent emissaries to request permission from King Josiah of Judah, but was denied. In the battle that ensued, the Israelites were defeated and King Josiah was killed. Israel consequently fell under Egyptian control. This caused a great mourning in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kgs 23:29-30; 2Chro 35:20-35). It made a tremendous impact and was their reference point for a long time, as Prophet Zechariah related, saying, "On that day the mourning in Jerusalem shall be as great as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo."

For we Christians (the new Israel), neither the defeat on the plains of Megiddo nor any other event in Israel's history is our focus. The most striking event of all time is Christ's Paschal Mystery. What else could have made more impact than that God suffered, died and rose again to save his wayward children! Hence, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me", and we vow, "We will never forget!" Therefore, the Easter event, comprising the Holy Thursday, the Good Friday and Easter Vigil of the Resurrection, is unique. Our First Reading anticipated this epic moment and proclaimed: "Thus says the LORD: I will pour out on the house of David and on the

inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and petition; and they shall look on him whom they have pierced.... On that day there shall be open to [the people of Israel] a fountain to purify [them] from sin and uncleanness."

Jesus is the one who was pierced. In our Gospel passage (Luke 9:18-24) he declared, "The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." Truly, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). In Him, we receive purification and forgiveness of sin. From His pierced side on the Cross, blood and water flowed out as "a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness" (cf. John 19:34). Can you see the place of the Divine Mercy devotion in the Church? Can you see the importance of the Mass?

The Mass (in its two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist) is the highest prayer. Through it, we focus on "the one who was pierced." In the aspect of the Ministry of the Word, St. Paul observed, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified" (1Cor 1:22-23). In the aspect of the Eucharist, he declared, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1Cor 11:26). Jesus' singular sacrifice is therefore our central point: to be proclaimed in the Word, and celebrated in the Church's Liturgy.

Finally, Jesus enjoined us, to not only proclaim and celebrate, but also, to apply the Mystery of His Cross in our Christian lives: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." St. Paul declares, "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). The way to glory in Christ's cross is to always strive to be committed to the authentic Christians life, even when it is contrary to the opinions of the world. We must also, for the sake of "Him whom they have pierced" (Mark 8:35), be committed to our stewardship of time, talent and treasure. May our families, marriages, jobs, and relationships always reflect the glory of Christ who was pierced. Amen.