

A Heart Divided Against Itself

The Third Sunday in Lent.

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“JESUS was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth.” This day I bring you greetings from our Lord and Savior who looks into our hearts as we wonder if indeed it is divided against itself. AMEN

Well, our journey through Lent is well underway and everyday we should take a moment to take stock of ourselves. It's interesting that as we spend time in scripture or devotions God opens His word and His will to us. One of the places we look to measure our progress is to the Law as contained in the Old Testament.

We talk about the Law all of the time in our worship and its interesting that through Scripture, it becomes very clear what the Law means to us as Christians. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us “Now we know that everything in the Law applies to everyone who lives under the Law, in order to stop all human excuses and bring the whole world under God's judgment. For no one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires. What the Law does is to make man know that he has sinned.”

Throughout Scripture there are measuring sticks that help us understand our failings. In particular we have the Ten Commandments which when I was in Sunday school seemed not to difficult to manage, after all there were only ten. There were to be no other gods but our God, no graven images, don't use the Lord's name in vain, take Sunday off, don't yell at my parents, don't kill anyone, I couldn't even spell adultery no less understand what it meant. Don't steal anything, don't call anyone names and don't be jealous of what others have that you don't.

But as you get older, you are able to understand how human nature deepens the meaning of each o these things. When God is on the back burner in your life-you have other gods such as money, career or achievements ahead of Him that you worship. How many times in a day-even when you think you don't mean it, do you use the Lord's name improperly. Football on Sunday vs. doing God's works or studying Scripture all day-no contest. Mom and Dad-when they are not a burden or nagging you. Murder-I haven't killed anyone yet, but there are some days I want to. Adultery-I know what it means now and although I have always been faithful to my wife, the Lord tells us adultery also means desire and lust. Steal-well, maybe I cheat a bit. Covet? We always find ourselves wanting more and trying to keep up with the Joneses.

So you begin to realize that you may not be as perfect as you sometimes think so you try to do a little better, change your ways and even rid yourself of bad habits.

Confession is always a great way to reflect on our weaknesses. It has been part of our spiritual life since the early days of the church and gives us the chance to really focus on our imperfections even when some of them are difficult to talk about.

But as you really open up to God's word, you begin to understand exactly what St. Paul says in another part of his letter to the Romans-that all are sinful and fall short of being righteous in God's eyes. So in trying to understand that we can never achieve perfection, what then is the use? The reality is that as we are justified to God by our faith, so faith must be the means by which we change our lives and make ourselves right with God.

There are no good works or good actions that make us whole with God. We become righteous through a full acceptance of Christ in our lives and in that allowing His grace to fill our hearts. We allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, to change us and mold us and even if we continue to fall, we know that through our faith we come to God as one of His own. The truth of this is that a change comes over us not because we have to obey God but because we want to obey God. We want to please Him in all that we do and we do not want to disappoint Him in any way. It is the simple childlike faith, the desire to please, the wish to be in favor with our Father that moves us.

It is here that we find the real issue in our lives. As our Lord says in today's Gospel-"a house divided against itself cannot stand." So this speaks to each of us and helps us to realize that a "heart divided against itself cannot stand" as well. Faith in our Lord and total trust is not a matter of lip service. It is a matter of full commitment from the heart. In that, we reach out to help, thank Him for everything in our lives-the good and the bad, place ourselves in His hands in our trials and tribulations, have full confidence that no matter what happens He will never abandon us. It is a complete submission to His will and allowing Him to take us where He would.

All of that is often against our human nature. We don't like to submit, we don't like to offer blind trust, we don't like to just hand ourselves over to anything. How do we know that things will work out? How do we know that what will happen is best for us? How do we know that God has our best interests at heart? We have those reservations because we look at God in man's terms. We see Him too often in the same we look at each other and don't realize the full magnitude of who He really is. So we hold back, we remain half committed, we do what we think is necessary but not much more. And so our heart, and our commitment, remains divided.

In one of my favorite movies, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Indy searches for the Holy Grail. One of the tests he must endure is a test of faith. He stands on a cliff looking at a portal on the far side of a great chasm and the only way he can get to the portal where the grail awaits him is to step out into thin air. He hesitates, and taking some dirt he throws it out into the air and sees an invisible bridge which he is then able to cross. Seeing is believing, and he steps out into the thin air and stands on invisible, but firm ground. Yet even Indy had to test things first and once he was satisfied, he was able to reach his goal.

We are not that different than Indy in our everyday lives. We want to make the effort, make the journey successfully and eventually find the treasure. But like Indy, we must first test the road ahead, be cautious and ease our way into things. True faith in Indy's case would have been to step out into thin air without ever testing it with a little dirt. That indeed is the message for us as well. True faith is leaping into the unknown without ever doubting that with God you are on solid ground.

When you stand in that place, you realize the depth of love God has shown for us and bask in His glory, appreciate His sacrifice for us and appreciate all that He has given us. That is when the division in the heart no longer exists and we are whole.

Our Lord gives us some simple rules that help us measure our faith-they are called in our worship the summary of the law. "You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul and all thy mind, and the second commandment is like the first-you shall love thy neighbor as thyself." This is what glorifies God and this is what can be deemed total commitment on our part.

So, let me leave you with another challenge for Lent. This Lent-let each of us give ourselves over totally to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and may the outward and inward sign of what we do be measured with the following question: "Has everything I have done today-Glorify God?".

My prayer for each of us this day is spoken by St. Paul in His letter to the Ephesians (5:1) where he exhorts us "*BE ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*"

May each of us be a shining example of God's love for us, in an undivided heart and in our desire to glorify God in everything we do. AMEN