

Revival 9 Sacramental Imagination

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

All: **And kindle in them the fire of your love.**

Leader: Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created

All. **And You shall renew the face of the earth.**

Leader: Let us pray.

All: **O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

As [Jesus] passed by he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him. We have to do the works of the one who sent me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Do all of you know who Agnes Bojaxhiu is? She is one of our most recent saints in the Catholic Church. She was born in Albania, participated in church youth activities when she was young same as you, before answering the call to become a Sister of Loreto. This took her to Ireland. She always had a fondness for taking on the religious name Sister Teresa. There was already a Sister Theresa there with an “h” so she spelled her name without the “h” so that the mailroom wouldn’t get confused. She eventually was sent to India and became a principal of a school there. One day, she encountered a dying woman in the street. People were walking by trying not to notice. Sister Teresa stopped what she was doing and sat down by this woman and held her in her arms. She wanted to make sure this dying woman passed away feeling loved. This is how Sister Teresa became Mother Teresa, by answering what she termed, “a call within the call”. She shared her vision with other sisters she knew about beginning a new order of sisters, and that is how the Missionaries of Charity got started. They are worldwide now as we all know, doing little things with great love.

What I want to focus on however is Mother Teresa's vision, her way of seeing, that allowed her to see the poor in a way others couldn't. A hundred people probably walked by that dying woman in the street trying not to see her. Mother Teresa however could see Jesus on the cross. This way of seeing was at the heart of her ministry. As she became famous, it was clear that most people didn't understand what she was doing. For instance, it was common for news reporters throughout the world to refer to her order's ministry as "social work." There were even some in the Church that made the mistake of characterizing the Missionaries of Charity as non-contemplative social workers. Mother Teresa responded to all of that by telling her sisters, and I quote, "We are not social workers. We may be doing social work in the eyes of some people, but we must be contemplatives in the heart of the world. We have to learn to pray the work. To do it with Jesus, for Jesus, to Jesus - then we are 24 hours with Him, and that makes us contemplative in the heart of the world." Isn't that great? Her ministry was with Jesus, for Jesus and to Jesus. What other people saw as a dying woman in the street, Mother Teresa could actually see the face of Jesus.

Tonight, I am going to share with you some advanced spirituality that I pray will be helpful to you. It is the art of seeing the world in a sacramental way. What is a sacrament? A sacrament is a visible sign that makes real for us invisible grace. Let's hear that again. Sacraments are visible signs that make real invisible grace. Sacraments are not metaphors, they are real. For everyone else, the dying woman in the street was just another unfortunate person that society failed. For Mother Teresa this dying woman was a visible sign that made real an invisible reality that was completely true. She could really see Jesus in this woman. When Mother Teresa spoke that way, she wasn't speaking in metaphor. She meant it.

This is what I mean when I talk about sacramental imagination. When I use that word imagination, I am not talking "make believe". I am talking about a real way of seeing the world. As I was praying about how to communicate this concept in such a short period of time, humorously enough the movie that came to mind was the Matrix. I have to be careful here though because it is a rated R film with a lot of violence and bad language. So, I am not here endorsing the film...but I am also assuming many of you might have seen it or are aware with the cultural references that have come forth from it. The cultural reference that came to mind is that moment when Morpheus presents Neo with two pills, a blue pill and a red pill. Remember that? If Neo takes the blue pill, he'll just wake up in his bed and he can believe whatever he wants to believe, or told to believe by the culture he lives in. However, if he takes the red pill, he will be able to see the world exactly for what it is...in a way few people can. Obviously, the idea that the world is a Matrix is ridiculous. However, we do believe that we live in a creation and that there is a Creator which in my mind makes for a useful analogy. This is why I think one way to think about sacraments is that they are in fact "red pills" that help us see the world the way our Creator and Lord sees the world, not in an imaginary way...but a real way. We can share in that sight.

The Gospel reading I chose for this evening is from John chapter 9. The disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Now notice how sinners operate! Instead of having compassion on the man born blind, they want to assign blame so that they can have the comfort of believing they can avoid this infirmity. Jesus does not offer them this comfort, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.” The disciples begin the story blind. Jesus is asking them to see God’s glory and love shine through infirmity. That takes sight. As the man born blind grows in spiritual sight himself in the course of this chapter, the religious leaders in the story ironically become progressively spiritually blind. In fact, at the end of the chapter, the man born blind becomes an evangelist, helping people to see Jesus.

The point of this chapter is that we are all this man born blind. All of us have the experience of being born into this world in mystery. We didn’t choose it and yet here we are. We go through life stumbling in the darkness asking ourselves, who am I? Why do I exist? What is my purpose? As we grow older, we also become acutely aware of our brokenness, our mortality, how fragile life really is and that we simply cannot save ourselves. That is when it happens. A light shines in the darkness. We discover that this light is a person. His name is Jesus. He gives us sight, the ability to see the world the way he sees it. He helps us with this through Word and Sacraments. The Word teaches us how to be his disciples. The Sacraments of the Church are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Sacraments are seven in number: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance or Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. Let’s briefly touch on the first three.

We use water for the sacrament of baptism. Water is a symbol for so many things: the waters of creation, the water we use to grow crops, the depths of the ocean and what is hidden from our eyes in the deep. In baptism, the water is blessed and utilizes so to make real our rebirth into the life of God. That new rebirth is not a symbol. It is real. It is why Jesus commanded his disciples to go out to all the nations baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We use blessed oil for the sacrament of confirmation. Oil in ancient times was medicinal, used for cooking like we do, however, it was also used to anoint royalty. Once oil is put on the skin, however, it cannot be taken off. This sacred oil makes real the Holy Spirit’s seal on us. God cannot be rubbed off. His love stays with us forever in good times and in bad.

We use bread and wine when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. At the last supper, Jesus said, “this is my body” and “this is my blood”. When Jesus said this, he was not talking in metaphor. He meant it. This is how he wants us to see it and experience it. Read John Chapter 6 if you are unconvinced. Jesus meant this literally. Why is this important?

For one, we will again have adoration of the Blessed Sacrament tonight. The world in which we live sees this as strange. Why are they worshipping a small circle of unleavened bread? The blue pill answer is that this is just a nice metaphor symbolizing God's presence. The red pill is that the Eucharist really and truly is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus. Back to that image from the Matrix, when Morpheus tells Neo that he can only show him the door. It is up to Neo to walk through it. Similarly, I can only show you the door to seeing the world in a sacramental way, in a Jesus way. Only you can walk through it. However, I believe if you ever have that moment when what you see on the altar is no longer bread but actually a window into heaven itself, you will know what I am talking about.

My friends, sacramental sight is transformative. Once you have it, you there will be times when you see the world in a different way. For example, we can look at Mount Rainier as a big rock with snow on it or we can be spiritually arrested by how beautiful it is...and how that beauty can make visible and real for us the grandeur of God. That is sacramental imagination. In the same way, we can see the people around us who look different than we do as really and truly brothers and sisters in the Lord. This has radical implications on how we treat each other at school, at work and in our community. Perhaps even more remarkable, once we see with Jesus' eyes, we might finally look in the mirror and love what we see there too in good times and in bad because what you see there is also a reflection of God's image and likeness. What you see there, God loves. So should you. In short, sacramental imagination can open our eyes to see the world in the way Jesus sees it. This experience can be summed up by a beautiful hymn we all know. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I'm found, I was blind, but now I see.

Guidance for the rest of the evening

At this time, I get to guide you through the rest of this evening. We will again begin with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. As I mentioned, it is an activity we call "adoration". We believe Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist and this is an opportunity to commune with Him. Soon after we begin adoration, I will then invite our young people enrolled for our Revival small groups to quietly move in the direction of their group leaders. Notice that the color on your name tags correspond to the color of the flags of your group leaders. There is no expectation other than being present; however, you are welcome to participate. The questions for conversation are on the handout. There are no wrong answers. The rest of us will stay and pray for you.

The main reason for these circles however is just an opportunity to offer a prayer at the end for whatever it is you are asking of God right now. You will be invited to light a candle representing that prayer and to bring that candle to place on the steps of the altar, to Jesus. After you put the candle on the steps of the altar, in reverence consider stepping aside and genuflect, making the sign of the cross, and then pray back at your seat for the others. I invite our group leaders to please be back here by 7:45, 7:50 at the latest, so we don't feel rushed. The evening will wrap up shortly thereafter with prayer and benediction. My heartfelt gratitude to all of you for being here tonight. Please stand.