

3rd After the Epiphany
January 27, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Use Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
At St. Joseph Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*

As if forty years of legalized abortion and fifty million dead children were not enough to demonstrate that we as a people do not appreciate the unique contribution of women to our society, the Pentagon announced one day after the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* that women in the military will be encouraged to apply to serve in combat roles. The same false conception of freedom that leads women to treat their fertility as a liability will now lead women intentionally to place themselves in harm's way, risking their lives to protect those who should be protecting them.

We must understand that legalized abortion and women in combat do not only represent a rejection of the role God has assigned to women. This madness also represents man's abdication of his responsibility to defend life. Forty years of encouraging women to kill the children he helped to conceive has now culminated in him staying at home while his mate goes out to confront their enemies. To put an exclamation point on how convoluted our thinking has become, the president said that the inclusion of women in combat is being undertaken to strengthen our nation's fighting capabilities. Does anybody really believe that? Does anybody really believe that an army of women will do a better job defending our nation than an army of men? How did we get here, to the point that the denial of the natural law simply is taken for granted by the chattering classes, our politicians and academics?

The answer can be found in today's epistle in which St. Paul describes the rivalries present in the Corinthian church of the first century. Rather than appreciate the gifts God had given them, many in the Corinthian church talked about the gifts they had not received, as if the reality that they did not possess certain exalted gifts prevented them full inclusion in the Body of Christ. St. Paul is forced to remind them that every gift, even if it seems insignificant at first, is integral to the function of the entire body. We are not to aspire to the gifts we do not possess, but instead, are to appreciate and use the gifts we do have in order that the whole may benefit. St. Paul here is attempting to foster in each individual the correct orientation towards the gifts he has received. We are to nurture and exercise our strengths, not wish God had given us something else.

Our culture's confusion about the proper roles for men and women stems from this original ingratitude that St. Paul encountered in Corinth and that the Church has had

to combat ever since. Rather than embrace the responsibility God has given men to provide for the vulnerable and also protect them, many men would rather see others fulfill their role while they undertake less risky pursuits. And, by the same token, many women wish to throw themselves in harm's way, denying their role as mothers as they chase after adventure. In neither case do men and women exercise the gifts God gave them to fulfill the role He assigned them.

By analogy, St. Paul points out the solution. He notes that the parts of the body that appear to be weaker are, in fact, indispensable. So while, for example, everyone may aspire to be an apostle, the Church just as surely needs competent administrators. The apostle appears to be far more important because he is out front getting all the attention, but the reality is that he hardly could do his job if he did not have a staff to lay the groundwork for his ministry. Just as the private parts of the body are not even seen, we would not have another generation if they did not do their job. They do not get much attention, but they are indispensable.

This same analogy can help us to understand what led women to aspire to male roles. For centuries the accomplishments of men have been celebrated while the indispensability of the women who supported them has been denied or ignored. Rather than insist that this indispensable role be acknowledged, the women of the past few generations, instead, have learned the wrong lesson: they imagine that the way to get noticed is for them to become something they are not, to do the things they do not have the gifts to do and, at the same time, neglect to do the things they have been assigned. Years of being denigrated and dismissed led them to forget how very indispensable they are. And here men are guilty too: women doing their jobs has meant less work for them, and men have jumped at the opportunity to be lazy and cowardly.

The results have been disastrous, a litany than you have heard before: a birth rate below replacement level; an economy that cannot grow for lack of people; forty percent of children born out of wedlock; a quarter of all pregnancies ending in abortion; half of all marriages ending in divorce; the denigration of females in film and music; the portrayals of men as buffoons and incompetents. We have spent so much time trying to be what we are not that we now entertain ourselves by drawing attention to our incompetence at fulfilling roles never intended for us in the first place! We truly suffer, spiritually and corporeally, from an identity crisis.

Remembering that the people of Israel wept when they received the Law in today's Old Testament lesson can be a great comfort to us. It teaches us that what God assigns us to do is not always what we want to do. Yet what He gives us to do is not only for our good, it is for the good of our neighbor. To drive home this point, as soon as the people wept upon hearing the Law, God told them to feast but that they should also send portions to those who had none.

As beneficiaries of the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ, we have even more than reminders about whom God's will benefits. Jesus' first words in our Gospel today are, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." We have the Spirit of God, given to us at

Baptism, and augmented in the reception of every Sacrament, to help us do precisely what God has given us to do. We do not have to spend time aspiring to gifts we simply have not received: we can give thanks to God for those we do possess and then, by God's grace, use them in the service of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The secularist denies women the treatment that her dignity demands by telling her to be something she is not. And the chauvinist does the same by telling her that her gifts are unimportant. The truth is proclaimed by the Catholic Church who treads between these false extremes to encourage the daughters of the King to embrace and celebrate the gift of motherhood, to be the precious bearers of life and stewards of the next generation. When we as Catholics live out our vocation, grateful for the vocations of our neighbors, we show the world that there is a different path, one that initially may cause them to weep, but, in the end, will prove to be the world's salvation, even as it offers to us inestimable joy.