

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

May 22, 2016

Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

of

St. Thomas More Catholic Parish

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

116 Theodore St.

Scranton, PA 18508

Scranton, PA

John 16:12-15

Romans 5:1-5

The period of revelation in the history of the Church ended with the death of the Apostle St. John. This is because he was the last living witness of Jesus' ministry on earth and could communicate the things that had been taught by Jesus but, at the same time, had not been written down. This is also because St. John's death defined the end of the apostolic era, when Jesus continued to reveal Himself and His will to the Church through the Holy Spirit after our Lord's resurrection and ascension into heaven, even after the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

This is what Jesus is talking about when He says in the Gospel today that He has ". . . yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." And then later He says, "[the Holy Spirit] will declare to you the things that are to come."

Included among those things they could not bear and things that were to come were, for example, the explanation Jesus gave to Peter about how he would be martyred for the Truth. Included also was the ministry the Church would undertake for the Gentiles. Indeed, at this point St. Paul had not yet even been converted and St. Peter had not yet received the vision that issued in the reception into the Church of Cornelius and his household. Included, as well, was the detailed description of the destruction of Jerusalem that we find in the Book of Revelation, which St. John received while exiled to the island of Patmos. In all of these examples, had the Lord given the revelation while He yet walked the earth, the effect on the disciples would have been one of confusion, to be sure, but perhaps also of discouragement. To make sure those revelations were received rightly, Jesus delayed them.

I've actually had a very clear experience of this same principle in my life. I knew at age seventeen that the Lord had called me to be a priest. I even told a friend from my high school in December of 1987 that I thought this was God's will for my life. Now I thought that God meant being a priest in the Episcopal Church, but even that I could not bear; so I ran away from God's call and I majored in international affairs while an undergrad. I even completed the R.O.T.C. basic course to see if I could be an army officer. Then I spent a semester working at a law firm in London to discern whether I should apply for law school. All this time the Lord patiently waited for me to respond to the call He had issued while I was still in high school. After failing in my interview with the State Department in Washington, D.C., I went to the pastor of my Episcopal parish and told him what I thought God had revealed to me five years earlier, and he said to me, "We've been waiting for you."

God did not choose then to reveal what He had meant all along, that my call to the priesthood was to be a priest in the Catholic Church. I would wander almost fifteen more years before submitting to the ordination God had intended for me from the beginning, but I could not bear it then; so Jesus did not reveal the things that were to come. In order for His plan for my life to come to fruition, the Lord knew that in my weakness the plan would have to be unfolded before me gradually. The Holy Spirit does not reveal the Father's will all at once. He waits for the children to be ready.

My point here is not to emphasize my priesthood, but my weakness and God's simultaneous understanding. We are cowards, as the disciples amply demonstrated on the Day of our Lord's Passion and Death. Because they could not bear to be martyred at that time, they fled when Jesus was arrested. Yes, each of them, save John, would eventually suffer the same cruel death, but on Holy Thursday they could not bear it; so the revelation of their suffering had to wait.

This is not to say that God's will changed or that His intention for them was different as they got older. The will of God does not change, but He does choose to delay what He has to say until our wills have been prepared to receive what He would have us do. When we desire to be conformed to His will, He will more readily reveal it.

The question then must be how we prepare ourselves to better be ready to receive what God wills in our lives. How do we better conform our wills to the Lord's, so that the Holy Spirit will make clear what we could not bear in the days of our youth, in the days of our weakness and cowardice?

The answer to this comes in our Epistle from St. Paul's letter to the Romans. Cowardice must be replaced by rejoicing in our sufferings. Remember how Peter and John in the Book of Acts were arrested and jailed, but later, after that particular ordeal was over, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name (Acts 5:41). Our tendency to run away from discomfort, to run from persecution, must be replaced by a willingness to carry our cross with Jesus.

In other words, in order for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the Father's will, we must be open to suffering as Jesus did. In order for the life of the Holy Trinity to be manifested in our lives most fully, we must, out of love for the Father, suffer with the Son. As long as we are like the cowardly apostles, fleeing in the face of fear, we demonstrate that we cannot bear what the Holy Spirit may reveal. As we become like the mature apostles, rejoicing in our sufferings, then we can both discern and live out what we are called to do.

As St. Paul reminds us, we must build up our endurance. Our pain threshold must increase so that we are men and women of character. Forget the world's celebration of victimhood, where griping about how we've suffered wins us the sympathy and praise of the world. Suffer instead with the Lord's intention—that in pouring ourselves out we are participating in the redemption of the world. The suffering, after all, is meant not to benefit us, if we are carrying the cross with Jesus Christ, but rather is meant to benefit the very people who nailed us to it. Our hope increases as the development of our character helps others precisely because we see that suffering joyfully really does transform lives. As our hope increases, God reveals more of what we're called to do because we can finally bear it.

If you are confused about the Father's will for your life, seek clarity by suffering with a smile. Love like Jesus, so that the Holy Spirit may declare to you the things that are to come.