

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

May 26, 2013

Homily for the Anglican Use Mass

of the

St. Thomas More Catholic Parish

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

Scranton, PA

John 14:23-29

The past week was marked by reports of atrocities on three different continents, but all of them were committed in the name of God by followers of Islam. First, in Asia, was the video of the summary execution of a dozen Syrian soldiers by the Syrian opposition. Next, in Europe, came the report of a British soldier run down and hacked to death on a London street, while his assailants yelled, “God is great.” And late Thursday or Friday we heard about Africa, where three Egyptian women were killed by ten of their own relatives in order, it was said, to preserve the family’s honor. In every case the murderers justified their actions as being in accord with what God would have us do.

Besides trying to strike terror into the hearts of their perceived enemies, the goal of all those murderers was the correction of injustice. The first murderer said his victims had committed atrocities against civilians. The second said his victim was guilty of crimes against Muslims in Afghanistan. The third said their victims were suspected of adultery and the family’s name had to be protected. Evidence of guilt is not needed when one takes it upon himself to be judge, jury, and executioner; and all three saw the solution to injustice to be the death of the offenders. The problem, however, is that in their zeal for justice they commit injustice, they perpetuate injustice, and the name of God is defamed.

Commentators who are not theologians, including the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, have said that these crimes have nothing to do with Islam; but, of course, they are wrong. Those crimes proceed from Islam precisely because Muslims deny the doctrine we commemorate specially today, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God. Their rejection of the Trinity is ultimately their rejection of love; so the pursuit of justice always issues in the death of others and never in the sacrifice of oneself. I will explain.

To say, as Christians do, that God is love is to proclaim something about the nature of God: that He is eternally self-giving, even in relationship to Himself. God is Love, in other words, even before creation occurred, and thus the only way by which this love could be shared was within the Godhead, between the persons of the Trinity. The Father loves the Son, who loves the Holy Spirit, who loves the Son, who loves the Father. Thus, the self-giving that we see exemplified upon the cross of Jesus Christ is inherent to the nature of God from before time existed, from eternity. This sharing, which Jesus describes in today’s Gospel, is revealed as God’s will for all mankind, since we are all made in the image of God. We are capable of such love precisely because it is part of our nature, a nature redeemed and restored in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

You see, God’s manner of correcting injustice was to sacrifice Himself. Rather than demand that the perpetrator of the injustice pay the price for his offense against the holiness of God, the Father sent His Son to make expiation for our sins. Justice was not extracted from us, the guilty, but was accomplished through the self-giving that is eternal in the Trinity. God saves us from our sin and restores our human nature by the sacrifice of Himself.

Christians, therefore, place a high premium upon mercy for the offender, since we ourselves have been shown mercy. But more than that, we show mercy because it is the nature of Love, in whose image

we were made, to turn the wrongdoer from sin by the sacrifice of ourselves. When we want to see the sinner turn, we make sacrifices for him in the hope that our love for him will teach him to love God as we do.

Thus, Catholics run shelters for the alcoholics living under our cities' bridges and food banks for those who blew their money on things they didn't need; and we open schools and hospitals to heal those who have ingested materials toxic to mind and body. This charity is undertaken because it is the nature of love to share. Our first inclination is to encourage transformation in the manner by which our Lord accomplished our transformation, by acts of love that are in accord with our nature. We condemn the sin, while loving unreservedly the sinner. Injustice is corrected by love.

Without this correct understanding of the nature of God, an understanding Muslims do not have and one they explicitly reject, the only option we have to correct injustice is vengeance. God is glorified, according to this framework, when the offender is punished—not when we humble ourselves, but when he is punished; not when we die for his salvation, but when he dies for what he has done.

What in the world, you ask, does this have to do with Stewardship Sunday? Our giving to our parish, the amount we give for the salvation of souls, proceeds from the same theology that leads Catholics to lay down their lives for the offender instead of requiring his life. We could easily fall prey to a theology that demands we steal from the rich in order to give to the poor. That manner of correcting injustice enthralled part of Europe for seventy years and still holds sway in other corners. But instead of committing injustice to pursue justice, Catholics choose poverty for themselves in order that others may be rich.

We aren't a wealthy group here, but by means of your sacrifices we have played a role, an important role, in the reconciliation to Holy Mother of literally thousands of people, not only here in the United States, but across the globe. I know that you could have used the money you've placed in the plate for other things, but no one of them is as valuable as the love that inspired that sacrifice or the souls who will thank you before the throne of grace for remembering them while they yet walked in darkness.

We could have written them off, as the murderers last week on three different continents wrote off their victims as unworthy of God's love. We could have responded to the injustice of their unbelief with the refusal of charity. But we believe in the Trinity, the God who is Love, so we gave our money, in order that sinners might possess what money cannot buy. The challenge is to remember how many still require our charity, to give and give until they will receive from God what they do not deserve from Him.