Solemnity of Lord Jesus, King of the Universe

End of Cycle A - 2017

“You Did It to Me”

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17
Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6
1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28
Matthew 25:31-46

A man was walking alone along some railroad tracks when he stumbled and suddenly got his foot caught in the tracks. He yanked, twisted and tried to turn every way in order to get his foot loose, but to no avail. Then, suddenly, he heard a horn and felt the earth rumbling beneath him. He turned around and saw a train coming his way. He panicked and started to pray, "God, please get my foot out of these tracks and I'll stop drinking!" Nothing happened, it was still stuck, and the train was getting closer! He continued praying, "God, please get my foot out and I'll stop drinking AND smoking!" Still nothing...and now the train was just seconds away! He invoked Heaven one last time, "God please, if you get my foot out of the tracks, I'll quit drinking, smoking and swearing!" Suddenly his foot shot out of the tracks and he was able to dive out of the way, just as the train passed. He got up, dusted himself off, looked toward Heaven and said... "Never mind God, thanks anyway but I got it myself."

Our human nature sometimes tries to tell us that it is up to us to fend for ourselves here on earth and that God’s domain is in Heaven and “never the two shall meet.” We can sometimes find ourselves going down this path because we don’t often directly feel or perceive the God’s intervention in the world around us in the way we hear of in the bible. Our faith, on the other hand, tells us the exact opposite: God made us and everything around us, became one of us, died to save us and continues to be with us here on earth. I think it’s safe to say that many of us struggle to reconcile these two experiences or mindsets. Today, however, we are reminded that God is our constant protection, healer, nurturer and giver of all good things. He is also, the homeless, the
hungry, the marginalized, the imprisoned, the sick and the lowly. In other words, God’s presence as Father, Son and Holy Spirit pervades everything, in all times and throughout His entire creation regardless of our ability to perceive Him or not. It is within this context that we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, when we reflect on what His kingship means and what our relationship to Him is, as his created subjects.

In our first reading from Ezekiel, we hear God assuring his people in exile that He has never left them and in fact, desires their return to the Land He promised them. God speaks to His people as a shepherd who is gathering His sheep, once again, after they had been scattered. We can look at this episode and say, “Well the children of Israel were in exile because they disobeyed God” or “were scattered as a punishment.” But if we look a little deeper, we can see that these results came about because of the DECISIONS that those in Israel made by turning their back on their Good Shephard. God, out of Mercy, Love and a commitment to His covenant, has come to find, rescue, heal, restore and protect not only those that were lost but all the sheep under His care: in other words, all His people.

This is echoed and reaffirmed in the familiar 23rd Psalm that we heard as well. God as the Good Shephard provides, heals and refreshes us when we join Him in His Kingdom. “There is nothing I shall want,” it says, because all will be as it was meant to be when all His sheep are gathered together in this Kingdom at the end of our lives here on earth and at the end of time.

All of this helps us to understand the deeper meaning of what Jesus reiterates and re-articulates to His disciples in our Gospel. Jesus is giving his disciples their final instructions before He is taken from them to begin His salvific Passion. Jesus’ Passion will complete the work of the Good Shepherd and usher in the time when sheep, those who were faithful to God’s plan, and the goats, those who continued to wander from Him, are separated and judged. What is important about these instructions to the disciples is the criteria used to determine faithfulness to the Good Shepherd. It’s not, “did you pray a lot” or “did you adhere to the customs well” nor “did you profess belief in the Law and the Covenant” but rather it is “did you ACT with Mercy”? “Did you act in a way that mirrors the way God has blessed you?!”
This is the paramount and fundamental question that all of us, here today, must be able to answer when we leave this earth. It is in our actions toward our neighbors and those less fortunate than us, that we affirm our Love of God and desire to be part of His Kingdom. And what Jesus is saying to us today, through His Presence in the Word Incarnate, is that when we do this to and for those around us, we do it to and for Him. God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is not absent from this world or relegated solely to Heaven, but instead is present fully in every element of creation. St. Teresa of Calcutta was famous for explaining this idea, which was her mantra, in a very easy to remember way with one hand. She would hold up her hand or ask the person she was talking to, to do so and would say five words with her or their five fingers, one for each word, “You Did It To Me.” Whatever you do or did, good or bad, you did it to Me, meaning God. In other words, every act of kindness, every act of Love, every act of Mercy is an action to and for the King of the Universe, the Good Shepherd, through His creation. Likewise, every act of selfishness, anger, hatred, or evil is an act against God. The point is that the King of the Universe is not separated from us nor is He indifferent to our plight. God gives us an example of His works of Love and Mercy towards us; it is the way we share that Love and Mercy in OUR ACTS of Love and Mercy towards others that show our desire to be a part of His Kingdom.

We can pretend that we can do and achieve and help ourselves in this world all by ourselves, like the man on the railroad tracks, but the reality is that God is present whether we acknowledge it or not in all His creation especially our fellow mankind. Sometimes however, it takes a train bearing down on us to realize that a stumble can leave us stuck and that prayer and faith in Christ, the King of the Universe, is the only thing that can truly set us free.