HOMILY FOR THE 27TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

Today we heard from the second story of creation. Maybe you didn’t know there are two different accounts of creation in the scriptures -- but there are. Actually, the one we heard today is more ancient. There we found God actually creating the first human beings by hand. In the first chapter of Genesis, which was actually written a good bit later, God is pictured as creating things through a creative word. He speaks and things come to be. The two stories were eventually woven together by an editor centuries down the road, which should really be no shocker. After all, no one was there to chronicle the whole thing when God set creation in motion. What is beyond question, though, is that each writer in his own way is making a statement that is a foundational element of the Judeo-Christian tradition – the unwavering belief that God is the source of all that is – that all life has sprung from God’s divine creativity.

This conviction was strongly reinforced last year about this time when our family took a trip to The Wilds. It was a wonderful day. We saw all kinds of fascinating creatures -- camels, bison, rhinos, giraffes, cheetahs, various kinds of deer and dogs, ostriches, zebras, Scimitar horned oryxes, and other animals we had never seen before, or even knew existed. Well, I came away from there saying to myself, “This all didn’t just happen. This had to be the result of the working of an infinitely fertile mind, with a good sense of beauty, drama, and comedy all rolled into one. In other words, I came away from The Wilds fully convinced of the truth that our scriptures proclaim – that God created the heavens and the earth.

Now in addition to affirming that God is the creator of all that is, the biblical writers also say something profound about how God relates to what he has made. In the case of the story from Genesis we heard today what the writer wants us to know by telling us that he created the first humans by hand is that there is a deep and intimate connection between us and God, because God has had a hand in our coming into existence.

I mean, think of how special hand-made items are to us – especially if they are made by someone we know. I remember something I made in wood shop when I was in the 9th grade. It was a flower pot holder. I made it as a gift for my mom. Now to give you a sense of how talented I was in woodshop, the shop teacher actually pulled me aside at the end of the course and said, “Damico, please do me a favor. Never take shop again!” So you know that this handmade flower pot holder wasn’t the most beautiful thing ever made. But I had made it. And because I was the one who made it, my mom kept it in the house. In fact, she even set it in a place where it would be seen. She did this because when she saw that flower pot holder, she knew that she was seeing something of me. She treasured it because of that. That’s the way it is with handmade things.

So when the biblical writer says that we humans are handmade by God, he is saying that there is a special connection between us and God – and a wonderfully intimate connection at that. In other words, when we see ourselves and other human beings, we see something of the God who made us. The connection is inescapable. And because it is God, the greatest all beings who created us, the connection is also wonderful.

This is what we believe about creation -- that there is a personal connection between God and all the creatures of the earth. And this fundamental aspect of our faith is what underlies the Church’s teaching on respect for all life. For every life is related in a personal way to the God who is its source, the God we love, the God with whom we hope to share eternity. This God, our God, has had a hand in the
life of every one and every thing that has come into being. And knowing this, we are bound to relate to
each and every life as my mom related to that flower pot holder I created – that is, as treasures.

According to both the writer of Genesis and Jesus as he spoke to us in today’s gospel, this is why
we must cherish and preserve the gift of the married life – because God has had a hand in creating this
special relationship. And so Jesus says, “What God has made, let no human being destroy.” I daresay
that if we were to actually look at our marriage partners as God’s gift to us. If we were to see our spouses
as those who actually have God’s handprints on them, then surely we would be moved to do everything
possible to honor and cultivate our relationship with them.

And the same is true with regards to the treatment of children. Remember in today’s gospel,
Jesus’ disciples didn’t want people to bother Jesus by bringing him their children. They thought that he
had more important things to do. But when Jesus looked at them, he saw the handiwork of his Heavenly
Father. And seeing them in this way, he couldn’t help but embrace and bless them. Knowing how
precious they were to his Heavenly Father, he couldn’t help but see them as precious too.

That we are precious to God, that God really wants to have a personal connection with each and
every human being is communicated in a most remarkable way in our reading from Hebrews. There we
were reminded of how in Christ, God took upon himself our human suffering. He became one of us and
suffered along with us, even to the point of dying on the cross. By doing this, he has shown us in a
remarkably vivid way that there is no human life -- however tormented, however broken, however
brutalized – there is no human life that is beyond the bounds of his love and care. This personal
connection between God and each and every human being can never be erased, because each one of us is
the product of his creative handiwork. In some way, we all bear the divine stamp that connects us to God.

This is why Respect Life Month is so important. We need to be reminded of this fundamental
reality that is so easy to lose sight of amidst all the violence and hatred in the world around us. We need
to be reminded of this divine connection to all life as we struggle to make our way through the challenges
and hardships we face at times, because facing these difficulties can cause us to change the way we see
things. They can make us see children in the womb as unbearable burdens rather than as blessings. They
can cause us to view children as commodities to be exploited rather than as cherished gifts to be protected
and nurtured. They can cause us to see criminals as trash to be discarded rather than as tarnished treasures
to be kept and restored. They can cause us to see the elderly as expendable, rather than as beloved
benefactors.

That’s why it is so important that we take to heart the message of today’s scriptures. For when we
begin to look upon all people as God’s personal handiwork, it will make all the difference in the world in
terms of moving us to a profound respect for all life.

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