

## THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (2022 - C)

Last Sunday, I mentioned that we are living in a time of rapid and significant change, a time which occurs only once every 500 years or so. Part of this change has been driven by advances in technology. For example, most people now communicate through electronic devices and not face-to-face and so handwritten letters have become a thing of the past.

However, technology is only partly responsible for the changes we are seeing. More important are two other factors.

One is the idea that modern man has outgrown God, that we can live without God in our lives and that everything is going to be just fine. The other flows from the first, and it's the idea that we can define who we are without reference to how God has created us. So, we have redefined the idea of marriage. We have redefined the idea of family. We have even decided that we can redefine who we are without reference to our physical bodies or to nature itself.

That said, in times like these, times of monumental change and transition, it's noteworthy that there is always a period between what was and what will come to be where there is uncertainty. There is always a void between when the order and continuity of the previous time ends and the stability of what is coming has yet to be established. This time is always a period of disorder and chaos. Our world is experiencing this now. Having abandoned God and even nature itself, we have entered into this in-between period of chaos and disorder.

Now I mentioned last week that I want to use the Sundays of Lent to talk about something positive and that is our holy Catholic faith, and I also want to talk about something practical, and that is how we can live out our Catholic faith and grow in God's love while at the same time living during this transitional time in a society which is moving from a Christian culture to one which is non-Christian, to a culture which is hostile to religion in general and to Catholicism in particular.

So here is the positive. We know that there is a God. We know that God exists, and we know that God loves us.

Now your first reaction to this might be surprise, not surprise that there is a God, but rather surprise that I am stating the obvious. We all know there is a God. That's why we are all here today. We have come to worship and adore the God who made us and who loves us.

Yet, what we know is not known by everyone and in fact is only known by a minority of people across the globe. What we know about the one, true God and of His Son Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Catholic Church and of Original Sin and of our Redemption through Christ's suffering and death on the cross, what we know is not known by even one in four people in the world.

That means we have been greatly blessed. We have been highly favored by God. We are privileged to know the truth about why God has created us and about the fact that God wants us to live with Him and about what we must do and believe to be saved. We are greatly blessed.

That said, everyone who leads what Socrates called an “examined life,” everyone who does any kind of thinking at all will at some point in their lives ask questions like these: “What is the point of life?” “Why am I here and what is my purpose on earth?”

We ask these kinds of questions because we all need to have some purpose in life. We all need to have some meaning to our lives. We all need to have a reason to live.

Life must have a purpose because if it does not, that would mean life is just a rat-race, and we are just hamsters on a treadmill running as fast as we can but getting nowhere. If that were so, then what’s the point? Why bother?

Fortunately, it is our loving God who gives meaning and purpose and order to our lives.

He has revealed to us who we are. We are rational beings, creatures made in His image and likeness. This means we are copies of God, not exact copies of course because God is uncreated and all-powerful and all-holy, and we are none of those things.

However, we are copies of God in that we have been given an intellect and a free will so that we can know the good and freely choose it. We are copies of God in that we have all been given an immortal soul which will never cease to exist. Finally, we are copies of God in that just as God is love itself, we were made to love, and it is in loving as God loves that we find happiness and fulfillment and peace and joy in life.

God has also given meaning and purpose and order to our lives in that He has revealed to us how we are to live our lives. He has also given to us the Commandments to help us lead lives of love and service to both God and man.

Finally, God has given meaning and purpose and order to our lives in that He has made known to us that our true home is in heaven. As Saint Paul says to us today,

**“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with His glorified body by the power that enable Him also to bring all things into subjection to Himself.”**

All of this knowledge we have, knowing who we are and why God made us and how we are supposed to live, should always be a source of great joy for us. We should think about these things often, and when we are tempted to look elsewhere for happiness, we should remind ourselves that “our citizenship is in heaven” and not here on earth.

Ok, so that’s the positive thing I wanted to talk about today. Now for the practical.

It’s a fact that most of the western world is suffering from a kind of societal amnesia. Our civilization was formed and shaped by the teachings of Jesus Christ and to a large degree by the Catholic Church. However, we have largely forgotten this, or else deliberately rejected our religious and cultural heritage. Because of that, we no longer know who we are which is why we see such great divisions in our nation today.

I can give you many, many examples of how our culture has rejected Jesus, but one in particular is the state of our colleges and universities which have the task of forming and shaping young minds. These institutions are now almost universally hostile to Christianity, and especially to true marriage and family life.

They teach that modern man has outgrown God, and that we can live our lives without God and everything will be just fine. To that end, they have worked to create a new culture where God is an afterthought and where God is no longer a defining influence in one's life.

This new culture does not look to Jesus Christ for answers to the questions of life. It does not look to Jesus Christ for guidance on how we should behave nor on how we should treat others nor for anything at all. They have rejected Jesus Christ who is the way and the truth and the life. These folks are not open to the truth. Their minds are closed.

People who follow this new way defy the Father's command to "listen to Jesus," but they do so to their own peril and their own unhappiness.

Sadly for us, the people who defy the Father and refuse to listen to Jesus now control nearly all of our society's institutions, and that is why we need a parish ark. We need a place where we can weather the storm until people are once again willing to listen to the truth.

It's time for us to be even more intentional in making our parishes places where truth and goodness and beauty are preserved and lived out, to be islands of light in an otherwise dark world, to be beacons of hope, and places of shelter from the storm that is raging around us.

To that end, I think the first thing we need to do is spend more time in fellowship. We need to spend more time affirming each other as we live out the teachings of Jesus in a world that is hostile to our faith.

For that reason, I am proposing that we begin to form many small groups in our parishes who will come together on a regular basis to pray and study and to fortify each other. I would invite all of you to join one. Then, after a time, we will reach out to those of our parish who have stopped coming to Mass and surround them with love and invite them to return.

Finally, we will reach out to those who have no faith and who are lost in the world and who do not know God nor why they are even here on earth, to those whose lives have no purpose.

If we are going to save our Catholic faith and pass it on to our children and grandchildren, we need to step away from of our dying culture. If we don't become more intentional about living our Catholic faith, it's only a matter of time before we are swallowed up by the chaos that surrounds us and by the new pagan culture that is toxic to our faith.

It's time for us to obey the Father and to "Listen to Jesus" with both ears and with all our hearts. I will say more about how we can do this and how I think we can build a parish ark in the coming weeks. Amen.