

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (2022 - C)

As I stated over the past two Sundays, this Lent I want to talk about how we can build a parish ark, that is, a place where we can support each other in living out our Catholic faith, a place where truth and goodness and beauty are preserved and where God is praised.

I have also mentioned why I think we need to build a parish ark. The main reason is because we live in a time of rapid and significant change. It's the kind of time which occurs only once every 500 years or so. In times like these, we need a place of stability and order. It's my hope that our parishes would become for us (and others) islands of light in a dark world, beacons of hope, and places of shelter from the storm raging around us.

Now during these Sundays in Lent, I want 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 in a society which is moving away 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 have been blessed to know the truth about God and about His plan for us. We know the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, and we know that God of the patriarchs because He is our God too.

We also know the name of God, the great **"I am."** Furthermore, we know Jesus the Christ, the holy and anointed one, the Messiah, who was sent by the Father into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world and to raise it up.

We also know that the Father and Son are one, not that they are the same person, but rather that they, along with the Holy Spirit, share in the same divine nature. That is why we can say that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. It's because all three possess the same divine nature equally. That is also why Jesus could use the holy name of God in reference to Himself when He said, **"Before Abraham was, I am (Jn 8:58)."**

Our God has made Himself known to us, and He offers to us a divine friendship, a profound union of persons. What is amazing about this union is that it is so unbelievably kind and so unbelievably loving in spite of it being so unequal. Yet, as incredible as it may seem, what we believe about this divine friendship is true. Our loving God holds each of us dear.

Ok, so that's the positive thing. Now for the practical.

From a practical standpoint, we are surrounded today by dishonesty and lies on a grand scale. We are lied to constantly about nearly all of the great truths of life. We are lied to about God and about salvation and about life and death and right and wrong.

Faced with all this, the first thing we must do is to have a great love for the truth. We must embrace the truth our Lord has revealed to us, and we must hold tight to that truth with everything we have. We must never let go of the truth.

So then, what is truth? That is a good question. It's the same question Pontius Pilate asked of Jesus. When our Lord was brought before Pilate, Pilate first asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said in reply, "My kingdom is not of this world." Then He said, "For this reason I was born and have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to My voice (Jn 18:37)." Pilate then scornfully said, "What is truth?"

So, what is truth? Truth is that which is. Truth is what corresponds to reality, to what really is, to that which actually is. The opposite of truth is falsity or incorrectness. Falsity is when what is said or believed does not correspond to reality, it is not what actually is.

Now this concept isn't hard to understand. Even three-year-olds know the difference between truth and lies. It's only sophisticated adults who deny that truth exists.

Like Pontius Pilate, our world today does not believe in the truth. Jesus said to us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6)." Yet the world has rejected Jesus. It has rejected the Truth incarnate. Consequently, it can neither come to the Father nor can it even know Him.

That said, let's look at one serious lie our society has embraced: the elevation of the rights of individuals over the rights of everyone else. This lie violates the Lord's second great commandment that we love our neighbor as ourself. This lie makes the private, personal good more important than the common good, but that's not good for anyone. Another way to put this is to say that we now have the tail wagging the dog.

To understand this better, let's start with the most basic group in society which is the family. In a healthy family where God's truths are lived out, the husband and wife are equally invested in the success of their marriage. To succeed, they begin with mutual respect. They also see to and anticipate each other's needs, and they put the other's needs ahead of their own. Why? Because they love each other, and because they love God.

Later, when children come along, this habit of caring for and loving others continues. Now as parents, the husband and wife have a new responsibility: the care and education of their children. Good parents not only provide for their children's physical needs, but more importantly, their education, and most importantly, their moral and spiritual education.

Good parents teach their children virtues, good habits. They teach their children to think of the needs of others and not just themselves. They teach them how to listen to and obey those in authority. Gradually, their children learn that it's not all about them, and that they are part of something bigger, that they are part of the family and not the center of it. They also learn they must pull their own weight if things are to go well in their home and family.

These lessons children learn from their dad and mom will later be applied to many other things in life. To sports teams or band in school or later on in life to civic organizations or to the nation and ultimately to the larger human family to which we all belong.

But what happens when the family breaks down? What happens when these lessons are not learned? What happens when a child is taught he or she is the center of everything?

Then you have a mess. When children are never told “No,” or when children are never given any expectations, or when children are not disciplined when they misbehave and disobey, they will grow up to become selfish and self-centered adults. They will grow up to become people who care for no one but themselves.

This failure to teach children they are part of something bigger is at the root of many of our society's problems. We see this in our schools when students ignore their teacher's instructions or show disrespect for their teachers and those in authority. We see this in the expectation many have that they deserve benefits for doing nothing at all. We see this in the unwillingness of many to make commitments and to keep them.

What we see today makes no sense because it is based on the lie that we don't have to love our neighbors because that life is all about us. Furthermore, because of this, we have become hypersensitive to feelings rather than facts. We have become conditioned to appeasing those whose feeling have been hurt instead of telling them to quit whining and grow up.

We have become conditioned to negotiating with people who make unreasonable demands, and we even do this with little children who are misbehaving instead of disciplining them for bad behavior. That explains why you see some parents talking to little children who are throwing tantrums instead of giving the child a swat.

In addition, we have taken away the tools to correct the situation. We cannot use punishment and heaven help someone who uses corporal punishment. So, we are left to try and reason with people who are unreasonable, and that doesn't work.

The fact is that if you are going to live with other people, then you must first look to what is good for everyone before you look to what's good for you. However, we have reversed that idea in our society, and that explains why the entire society must now make adjustments to accommodate the demands of tiny minorities.

We are not lone rangers. We are not independent agents who have no responsibilities towards anyone but ourselves. Quite the contrary, we are all part of the human family and that is why Jesus gave us the commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

This great truth is something we must hold on to with both hands. While our society has abandoned this truth, we must continue to teach it in our parishes and practice it in our families and expect it from others. It is the foundational principle for married love, for families and for society itself.

Living in this way will bear fruit in our lives and in the lives we touch. It is also an expectation God has for us and we must live up to it. Let us then do our best with the help of God's grace to do just that. Amen.