

For Sunday, March 11, 2018

Choosing a Life of Light

Fourth Sunday of Lent

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/031118.cfm>

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

As a military family, we often find ourselves living far from those closest to us and going at life alone. While some years have felt lonely, others have felt full depending where we were stationed. Right now, we live less than a mile from the ocean, which has guaranteed us one thing over the past three years: a steady flow of visitors. Each year, we've housed friends and family who are either traveling through, coming to vacation, or staying awhile to help. Our most recent guests were my parents, who trekked miles and miles to find reprieve from the snowy north.

While they visited, I was blown away by the emotion I felt processing life near them again. As I parent my own rapidly growing children and dig into adulthood, being around my parents and recalling my own childhood was like a steady flow of nostalgia and gratitude. I looked at how much I pour out into my children day in and day out and then looked at my parents, finally fully realizing how they did the same for me. Although I felt immense gratitude, it settled into my heart that there's no adequate way to say thank you for that. It is just something to be received and felt. It is a gift gratuitously given solely for the good of the other. It is love.

The readings this Sunday should plant us firmly in that same reality as children of God.

The First Reading from Chronicles proclaims the truth that God is always first calling out to us, inviting us into a relationship with Him. We read that "early and often did the Lord, the God of their fathers, send his messengers to them, for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place." The first message after the Fall was of good news, and throughout the years of broken covenants, the message God gave us time and again was *still* one of good news. He looked on us with love and compassion.

When I look ahead to the coming years raising my kids, I often wonder what it will look like. With my parents here, I had a small glimpse: it will look like always giving more chances to repent, giving more chances to make the right choice, forgiving even when they don't really understand the harm they've done, and choosing to give them unconditional love no matter how many times they fall. It's exactly what my parents tried to give to me. It's the divine parenting pedagogy.

But moving into the rest of the readings and the Gospel, there's an even starker truth revealed to us: it's not enough that He calls us first. We must respond. We need to allow ourselves to be loved by God. We are challenged with the antidote to our brokenness and darkness: the light of Christ. Ultimately, we must choose



just like our ancestors had to choose. Will we sing songs of sorrow for having missed the goodness of God being poured out on us like in the Responsorial Psalm? Or will we allow ourselves to be loved?

As I parent, I realize an integral part of my childhood was just being a child, helpless at times and fully expecting to be loved no matter what. As I raise my kids, I know they aren't trying to *do* anything special. They are just content to live life and soak up the love my husband and I can shower on them. That is their pure joy and happiness.

That is the freedom we are called to as children of God ... the truth we hear proclaimed in the Second Reading and Gospel this weekend. St. Paul reminds us that we have been saved through grace, a completely free gift of God by sending his Son. You and I are the recipients of divine and perfect love!

Along with soaking up love, my children always choose light. I've never met a child who chooses darkness. At night, they require their night-light. After a bad dream, a lamp is left on. They thrive in the daylight, jumping around and playing. We are admonished in the Gospel to live so as to prefer the light. How can we do this without claiming our spiritual childhood?

The readings this Sunday are a reminder of that perfect gift of God in Christ Jesus: a life of light, freedom, grace, and love. We can prefer the darkness, denying our spiritual childhood, or we can act as God's children and run toward the light, allowing ourselves to be loved and receiving that gift.

The following excerpt from Fr. Jacques Philippe's book *Time for God* pulls this together for us when he says:

"Often we find it easier to love than to let ourselves be loved. Doing something, giving something, gratifies us and makes us feel useful, but letting ourselves be loved means consenting not to do anything, to be nothing. Our first task in mental prayer, instead of offering or doing anything for God, is to let ourselves be loved by Him like very small children. Let God have the joy of loving us ... there is no true love for God that has not grasped that, before doing anything at all, we have first to receive."

Angie Windnagle

PRAYER

Father God,
I come into Your presence
so aware of my human frailty
and yet overwhelmed
by Your love for me.
I thank You
that there is no human experience
that I might walk through
where Your love cannot reach me.
If I climb the highest mountain
You are there
and yet
if I find myself in the darkest valley of my life,
You are there.
Teach me today
to love you more.
Help me to rest in that love
that asks nothing more
than the simple trusting heart of a child.
Amen.