

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, October 18, 2020

Feet in Two Worlds

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5B

Matthew 22:15-21



Isaiah eloquently reminds us of a most certain yet often forgotten truth about our Divine Master, "I have called you by name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the Lord and there is no other, there is no God besides me." Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and each one bears a special name known only by God. God did not just create us as a bunch of random forms but as a unique child with a personality, soul, and character shared by none other. He calls us and names us into being. All of this happened without our knowledge in the secret of our mothers' wombs. But while the mystery and particulars of our creation lay hidden, we knew the love and beauty of the gift! In the wonder of that holy womb, I rested in peace and tranquility with the One who knew me well. My innocence expressed itself in my growing and becoming. I danced with delight. God delighted in and perhaps even smiled at me.

Faith allows us to see the ordinary in an extraordinary way, bringing us to deeper truths and experiences. We can dream, wonder, hope, and even love with greater expression because of the image we bear within us. When we are birthed into this world, that original innocence soon is veiled and stained. It becomes harder to grasp and possess those truths we once knew so well and treasured. The inheritance of original sin quickly becomes something with which we must wrestle. We have to keep our feet in two places. While we are of this world, we also are very much members of another. It is challenging to attend to our civil obligations while remaining loyal to the greater truth that God is God and there is no other. We want it all to match and be the same and find ourselves incredibly frustrated when it's not. Did Jesus expect it to be?

It seems that he saw the two allegiances as being separate with our investment in the workings of both. We are asked to give to Caesar, with all the inadequacies, hypocrisies, limitations, biases, shortcomings, and failures found in any secular endeavor, and we are asked to give back to God. Seeking social and political structures and agendas as a means to truth is where we blur our allegiance and forget that God is God. It is all too easy and tempting to place our faith aside and fall into the illusion that we can somehow put this all together without God and find happiness just the same. God cannot be taken out of the equation. We have to do our due diligence with regard to our civil obligations but we also must give to God something even more.

We are living during a time of catastrophic change, turmoil, dismantling of former systems and ideology, and extreme uncertainty. Is it too farfetched to conclude that the systems we have in place are broken and unable to rectify the problems spiraling out of control before us? Yet, we are asked to navigate through these civil systems and give back and participate in a way we judge best. There is no perfect way. Our faith will not find a happy home. Jesus knew that it could be different which is why he eloquently put forth God's vision for the world in the Beatitudes. It would be nice if it all could just come together as one, without disharmony or discord. Practical sense and wisdom continue to tell us that it won't. It is why the central symbol of our faith lies in the torn and mutilated body of a man hanging on a tree. What can be perceived by a non-believer as a gruesome defeat is for the person of faith a tremendous victory!

How can we bring that victory into the everyday workings of our lives? If it is not possible by being able to extend the fullness of our faith into the public sphere, then perhaps it can be done by giving back to God what is God's.

Now, more than ever, we are called to embrace God's vision for the world and work for justice, peace, and integrity, all the while preserving the sacredness of human life in all its stages and forms. We cannot neglect returning to God the very image God has placed upon us. This is done most excellently in restoring the integrity of that image with all my brothers and sisters. We are not objects to be manipulated, ridiculed or berated. We are God's children who need to find our way back to the innocence we once knew at our conception. This is not some far off pipe dream but something that is real and attainable now.

We give back to God what is God's when we begin to accept and see the power of God's creative will in all things. Even the darkest of experiences can be incredible opportunities if we trust that God is there even though unseen and often unfelt. We give back to God when we listen to each other's stories, without judgment or criticism, hearing their pain and receiving their fear. We give back to God when we realize that our resources need to be protected

and shared, and that success is not about power and domination but opportunity and abundance. It is not about what I can keep for myself but what I can do to share more. We need to lose our entitlement to entitlement and seek after the wonderful gift of humility. It is the only gift that can put us back into proper relationship with God, ourselves, each other, and all of creation. Without that virtue and charism, we stand to achieve little success. We have to strive to speak the truth, even when it hurts to do so and be honest.

We can begin to do this because of our faith, and we can accomplish these goals in the relationships we share every day. Every person we meet is an opportunity for blessing, for giving back to God. We only have to learn how, through prayer, to heighten our awareness of opportunities to do so, and the best way to give back. St. Oscar Romero put it so well. "We must overturn so many idols, the idol of self first of all, so that we can be humble, and only from our humility can learn to be redeemers, and then can learn to work together in the way the world really needs." All our idols need to be put away, and there are many. There will also need to be great personal sacrifice, much more than is required of us in the payment of our civil taxes.

Fr. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

"Love unknown!

We think that your wonders are past and finished and that all we can do is copy the ancient volumes and quote your words out of the past!

And we do not see that your unceasing action is an infinite source of new thoughts, new sufferings, new works, new patriarchs, new prophets, new apostles, new saints, who have no need to copy each other's lives or writings, but only to live in perpetual self-surrender to our secret operations."

(Jean Pierre de Caussaude)

As I abandon myself into your presence, O God, inspire me to use the talents you gave me, think creatively and act justly, as I navigate through these challenging times. Help me to be humble so that you can use me to bring your healing, wisdom and love to our broken and fragile world. For it is only in seeking your presence that I can come to know myself and in knowing myself, learn to shatter all of the idols I create to replace you. Help me to discern what is of benefit not to me but to all of my brothers and sisters in the world. Grant me the fierce gift of courage that will allow me to trust even in the midst of uncertainty and turmoil. Thy will be done. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.