

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

[*Isaiah 55: 6-9; Psalm 145; Philippians 1: 2-24, 27; Matthew 20: 1-16*]

As I gather with you here today my mind goes back to the day of the fire. I remember spending the whole afternoon there, and like others, watching, feeling helpless, as the firemen struggled to contain and put out the fire. We were all storming heaven that day, as we prayed that the damage would be limited. I also remember many people gathering throughout the afternoon. That was a sign to me of just how important this particular church building is to the people not only of the parish but also of the broader community.

The next day I went back to the church to see for myself how things were. Your two priests got me fitted out in the latest high fashion rubber boots and in we went. I could see that the project of restoration will involve a lot of work, but I am confident we will get that done.

When we consider now the texts from Sacred Scripture, what is brought to our minds is another kind of restoration that has to happen; the restoration not of a building but of the soul. The parishioners of Sacred Heart are famous for saying that the Church is not a building; it is the people. That is true, of course. The sacred texts today are addressing themselves to the church in that sense and teach us what has to happen for the restoration of the soul to be accomplished.

The first thing we need to keep in mind, before even looking at these particular texts, is that the price of restoration has already been paid. We wonder what it will cost to restore the building, will the money be there, will insurance cover it, and so on. The cost to restore the souls of humanity was nothing less than the death of Jesus on the Cross. By his dying and rising, the price has been paid and humanity has been restored to communion with God in and through Jesus. From this we know that restoration of each soul happens through being united with our Lord.

So, then, the question becomes: how does union with Jesus happen? There is a lot that we can say about this, but this morning I shall focus on just two aspects that are highlighted by the Gospel text. Two things that need to happen if our souls are to be restored through Jesus are these: “get out of the way” and “get to work.”

First, “get out of the way.” That fateful Sunday afternoon I was walking around the property with Fr. Susai. I remember at one point a fireman very gently and politely asking if we wouldn’t mind moving away from where we were standing. It was a very nice way to say “Get out of the way.” So of course we did. We did not want to be any obstacle to the work of saving the church!

The work of restoring our souls belongs first of all to the Holy Spirit, who is sent to lead us to Jesus. There is a way that we can get in the way of the Spirit. This happens whenever we think that human logic is the determining measure of the possible. In this regard, both the prophet Isaiah and the Lord Jesus say to us: Get out of the way! God is far wiser than your wisdom, more powerful than your weakness. Get out of the way by beginning to see as God sees and to replace human logic with divine wisdom.

Isaiah says it simply when he speaks these words from God: “[My] thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Jesus makes the point through the familiar parable of the workers in the vineyard who, although some have worked much harder and longer than others, nevertheless all receive the same pay. Those who had put in more hours grumble at the injustice of this. The point of the parable, though, is not to make a comment on labour theory. Rather, it wants to shock us into an awareness of just how vastly different God’s ways are from our own. What God wants to give us is mercy, a recompense that no one could ever merit or earn. It is pure gift, and God pours it out lavishly and equally upon all people. So, what Jesus is saying is, “Get out of the way;” don’t be an obstacle to God’s restorative work in our lives by presuming that human wisdom can define the limits of God’s action.

The second thing we are told is necessary for the full restoration of the soul is: “Get to work.” On the day of the fire, we wanted those firemen to get to work and stay at it until the job was done. Well, Jesus wants us to get to work in proclaiming the Gospel. That, too, is part of restoration, because once we have been restored by God’s mercy, it falls to us to share that good news with others. In the parable, the landowner constantly goes out into the marketplace looking for labourers, and offers work to those standing idle. There is important work to be done. God is calling us not to be idle but to get to work in the power of the Spirit, to go into the world, His vineyard, as messengers of the Gospel.

The one who has paid the price of human restoration, Jesus, is with us now in the Eucharist. He is the only “insurance” we need for our lives. Through the Spirit, he is now at work to bring us to himself. So, in this mass, as we look forward to the restoration of the church building, let us pray for the restoration of our souls. May the Holy Spirit help us “get out of the way” of the Lord’s work within us, and then push us forth to “get to work” in announcing the good news of restoration to all people.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
Sacred Heart Parish
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