

HOMILY for 18th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's Gospel shares with us how Jesus would like people to focus on spiritual world. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

An elderly woman in her nineties had a visitor from her church come to see her at the nursing home. "How are you, my dear?" the visitor asked.

"Oh," said the elderly woman, "I'm just worried sick!"

"You look like you're in good health. They take good care of you here, don't they?"

"Oh yes, they take great care of me here."

"Do you have any pain?" the visitor asked.

"No, I can't say that I do," the elderly woman replied.

"Then what has you worried about?" the visitor asked.

The elderly woman leaned in & explained. "All of my closest friends have already died & gone to Heaven. I'm sure they are all wondering where I went!"

Anyway, as you might know from last couple of Sunday's Gospels, Jesus was hand-on & very concerned about the physical & spiritual well-being of the people of God. That's why He tried to heal the afflicted & feed the hungry every chance possible. In case we have any doubt about that intention of the Lord, this Sunday's First Reading tells us the memorable story on how He took care of the people of God after their escape from Egypt. They first cried out to the Lord to free them from the yoke of slavery. Thankfully the Lord heard their prayers & called on Moses to take on that tough task. Under God's protection, they miraculously made it out of Egypt. As they wandered in the desert without much provisions, they remembered the food that they used to have in Egypt. So, Moses came to the Lord on their behalf to ask for some bodily nourishment. He also called on the Lord to heal them from snakebites in that dangerous environment. The Lord answered his request & sent them manna in the morning & quails in the evening. He also told Moses to make a bronze serpent for all the victims of snakebites to look up to it & find healing.

However, Jesus usually did a miracle & then pointed the public to the spiritual world. He never wanted to act like a magician & keep on producing one extraordinary act after another. For Jesus, it was always about the spiritual world. For Spirit is what keeps our human body alive & works behind the scene to make miracles happen, including the resurrection of the dead. Moreover, spirit/soul never dies even after our body is long gone. That is why Jesus came down to earth to save our spirit/soul & point us to the spiritual world/Heaven. Personally I'm not surprised to see Jesus reacted the way He did in today's Gospel. Here is how the Gospel reported it, "...When they [the crowd] found Him [Jesus] on the other side of the lake, they said to Him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered them: 'I assure you, you are not looking for me because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten your fill of the loaves. You should not be working for perishable food, but for food that remains unto life eternal, food which the Son of Man will give you.'" So, Jesus apparently cautioned the crowd not to come to Him for more free foods after experiencing the miracle of multiplication of the loaves & fish. They should reflect on that miracle & draw a spiritual conclusion about Jesus' true identity & their need for a personal conversion. He wanted them to view that miracle as the springboard to help them get to the spiritual world. Otherwise, His mission & ministry on earth would be totally useless.

As you might have heard me express my frustration & confusion on the Church's current mission, now you know how & why I have come to that feeling. In my humble opinion, the Church has spent too much time & efforts on abortion & social issues instead of spiritual ones as the Lord would want it to do. First of all, we do not live on earth forever. Then, why should we talk & focus on abortion & social issues all the time? Second, the Church should concentrate on the spiritual world & get people to prepare for & head to Heaven instead. Otherwise, they'll never be ready for it when the Lord calls them home for the Final Exam. If they flunk that test, they'll never be able to take it again. Even if the Church tries to do charitable work at God's Kitchen & hospitals, it should learn from Jesus & point people to the spiritual world in the end. That is how our Lord did in today's Gospel. That is why I think the Church's current mission of highlighting abortion & other social issues is really off the track. Anytime that the Church does not focus on the spiritual world/Heaven is a missed opportunity for it to keep alive the mission of our Lord. Finally, Jesus came to save souls & give the whole world the opportunity & the way to get to Heaven. If the Church continues make up new rules to push people away from that destination & condemn sinners, we would certainly do contrary to Jesus' mission of saving souls. The Church must find every possible way to reach out to the world & point people the spiritual world/Heaven & make it intriguing to them. For that is where they will find true peace & happiness. As Jesus puts it at the end of today's Gospel, "I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall thirst again."

My dear brothers & sisters, we Christians believe in & value the spiritual world above everything else on earth. Jesus came into our world to highlight that message & open the door to Heaven for us. We have welcomed His Mission & decided to carry it on when we were baptized. It is time for us to take on that mission seriously & do something to further it until harvest time. It is time for us to stop arguing about politics & start inviting people to think about Heaven & the spiritual world. For that is what our Lord would want us to do as His faithful disciples in this world.