

FEBRUARY 25, 2018

Second Sunday of Lent

Reading 1 GN 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18

Responsorial Psalm PS 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19

R. (116:9) **I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.**

Reading 2 ROM 8:31B-34

Brothers and sisters: If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us, who will condemn? Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

Gospel MK 9:2-10

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

HOMILY:

Let me be honest, I really don't want to talk about this. But, as a spiritual leader, I must. It's what many are talking about this week: another story of violence against the innocent, this time in a high school in Florida. I'm not sure how you react to these situations, but my reaction is sorrow and prayer. Increasingly, this reaction of prayer is scorned by some. One of the more moderate yet direct expressions of this reaction among some was from Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey, who said, "When is enough, enough!?! How much bloodshed, how many more deaths!?! My heart breaks at the news from Florida. I mourn the senseless loss of life. This must not be normal, such carnage must not be routine. Thoughts and prayers are not enough. Our nation must act." Amen. Of course, something in addition to prayer is required. But . . . the more general criticism of an immediate response of prayer fails in its understanding of the depth of what prayer is. For the believer, prayer is not just asking God to fix something and, at the same time, abandoning all human effort to improve our human situation. These prayers were prayers of sorrow, hearts broken and crying out to our God in our seeming helplessness against persistent human choices of evil. The world is wounded and we hurt because of it. We cry out to our Father.

Much of the immediate discussion has been about the "how" of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on Ash Wednesday, in a modern St. Valentine's Day Massacre of the innocent: How did he get his hands on that gun? How can such guns be available, anyway? How did he get into the school? How could it have been prevented? However, this is not a homily about how, but *why*. I can't say everything about this most complex situation, but I can say something. So, apologies if a seven-minute homily can't say all that needs to be said. I'm not even trying. I am not a psychologist, psychiatrist, or any other kind of "ist." Instead, I take my legitimate place in this national discussion by speaking from the perspective of our faith and what it has to say to us in such times. And, not being a psychologist, I cannot offer a medical diagnosis of this violent man. But I can speak from our faith, when saying: Isolation is the essential why behind this tragedy, for *Isolation leads to death, but Communion to life*.

Again, with apologies that we even have to talk about this, but with confidence that the "truth shall set us free," consider the following unnerving testimony of frustrating warnings taken unheeded:

“An unidentified person . . . called the FBI more than a month . . . [ago] and said she was worried Cruz would “get into a school and just shoot the place up. . . I know he's -- he's going to explode.” The woman said she wanted to clear her conscience in case “he takes off and, and just starts shooting places up. Something is gonna happen.” Another reported about Cruz after the fact, “He's [been] thrown out of all these schools because he would pick up a chair and just throw it at somebody, a teacher or a student, because he didn't like the way they were talking to him.” [CBS News.com 23 Feb 2018] This is a “textbook” case of what an expert on these shootings calls an “antisocial personality disorder,” characterized by the person who disregards, or violates, the rights of others, has little to no conscience or regard for societal laws, and acts with no remorse or capacity for empathy. In summary, then, out of an anti-social person, out of his isolation came death.

Why has this happened? Notice I didn't say “how.” I'm seeking to reflect on what motivated this and similar wicked choices. Our society has become, ironically, more anti-social. Many factors have contributed to this: modern philosophy's exalting the individual and his/her rights over the larger society; the quickening pace of society that causes a tendency, with all that is assaulting us, to draw into our selves for self-preservation; a rising relativism that tempts us to think that I am not my brother's keeper, nor may I be; an increased callousness to violence, after we have been fed with a steady diet of violent images that render the violent more familiar and less shocking; and life on the Internet that lessens the depth of empathy with the steady stream of shallow, fleeting images of life and humanity. All contribute to the weakening of social bonds, social responsibility, and empathy for others, which made this act of violence ever-so-slightly more conceivable.

We can't solve the wounded world, but there is cause for hope. For what we can do, here in Waterloo IA, is to reach out of our own isolation into the of isolation of others, forming a richer communion and concern for others. And here is where faith can motivate us to live less in isolation and more in communion. For our faith calls us to live not for ourselves, but for others and in communion with God.

In today's second reading, St. Paul does touch on the social remedy for the anti-social, when he says, “If God is for us, who can be against us.” Note that he does not say, “If God is for ME, who can be against ME.” And, in their experience of the dazzling fullness of life on the mountain of transfiguration, a communion with God is experienced not in isolation but among the group of disciples: “Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them. . .”, teaching them that life is full when it is lived with others. It is the very pattern of our lives, that we have been created not for isolation, but for communion, communion with others and communion with our God.

Parkland FL: How did this happen? Someone, mired in isolation and so lacking in human empathy, made a wicked choice. ***But isolation is why it happened.*** While our society wrestles with how to limit the human capacity for evil and to protect the innocent, as people of faith, we can speak to the why of the situation by asking how we can contribute to as society less characterized by isolation and more characterized by communion. How can we be leaven of communion, common good and concern and how can we strike at the tendency to isolation, in our homes, online, and across the entirety of our lives that tends to death? How can we reach out to the isolated and offer them community and communion? Because we are all in this together, we all contribute to the problem and we all can contribute to its improvement. But, we can only contribute in this part of the world, our part of the world, Waterloo IA.

Today, then, we have come together to take a dose of the remedy that is Communion, gathering together and coming to the Other who saves us from ourselves and strengthens us with love for communion. Where else can we go? When faced with the sin-sick world, ***we are driven to this mountain***, symbolized by the fourteen (14) steps from outside to this altar, to this Eucharistic mountain, with sorrow at evil in the world but with hope that comes from Communion with the One who alone can definitively overcome the isolation in our lives that tends to death. On our own, humanity cannot perfect itself. Let us come to perfect love, and then let us go forth from this place of communion to reach out to the isolated in our families and our community, one choice at a time. For as we have sadly seen, isolation is death—but communion is life.