

The Greatness of the Message

St. Jerome, in reflecting on this passage and talking about the proclamation of the Kingdom and the miracles that were happening, said that the greatness of the miracles was meant to match the greatness of the message.

So, the greatness of the miracles is meant to match the greatness of the message. The miracles aren't really about the miracles themselves, but point to the message.

The message, or the proclamation, is a word in Greek that we call the kerygma. I don't expect a lot of you have heard of it, but how many of you have heard that term, the kerygma? Almost half. That's pretty good.

Well, the kerygma, if you don't know what it is, is basically this: it's the proclamation. And the basic Gospel message can be boiled down to five parts. It's really important that we understand these five parts, because these five parts are how those who do not have faith come to conversion when they hear the message.

- The first part of the message is: God loves you. That is very, very good news.
- The second part of the message is: because of sin, we have lost communion with God. That's kind of the dark part of the message.
- The third part of the message is: Jesus died and rose for you and for all of humanity.

So again, tracing the steps so far: God loves you. By sin, we have fallen out of communion with God. And out of communion with God, there is no life. There is no eternal life.

Flip it back to the Good News: Jesus did that for you because He loves you.

- The fourth part of the message is that we access that grace by repentance and faith.
- And the fifth part of the message is that, by doing so, we receive new life in the Spirit.

That's the kerygma, and it is the proclamation of the Kingdom. That is the message so great that the greatness of the miracles is meant to point to it.

Just one more time: God loves you. By sin, you have fallen out of communion with God, and you can't get back yourself. Jesus did that for you. By repentance and faith, we step into what Jesus did for us. And finally, by that, we are offered new life by the Holy Spirit.

That is the message.

Now, in reflecting upon this basic message and our readings today, especially as it declares that Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, what it calls to mind for us is that, as Christians, we have an infinite dignity. Infinite dignity.

Because you're made in the image and likeness of God, whether you are in Christ or not, you have an infinite dignity.

And with that infinite dignity and potential, though, it calls forth our call and our potential to live into the grace, and the importance of us living into the actuality of the grace and our potential as Christians.

The Sacred Heart and the Love of Christ

This last week, you might know, the bishops of our country consecrated our nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in preparation for the 250th anniversary. And so I want to talk about the Sacred Heart and how it relates to what I'm talking about today.

Really, the Sacred Heart is a renewal, a specific image to get us at the Gospel message and the importance of our responding to it—the importance of the response on our end.

Basically, the Sacred Heart historically began to really take root and rise to the level of a solemnity in the Church based upon the revelations of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. In these revelations, the basic message of Jesus is: here is My heart, My burning love for each and every one of My children, My burning heart for each and every one of My children.

Essentially what the Lord is saying is: a lot of you all are stuck at step three. There is not this repentance and faith and stepping into life in the Spirit. A lot of My children are stuck.

Jesus identified a main problem for people not stepping into it: people are more or less far from Him. He does emphasize in His revelations that sin wounds Him. It wounds the Body, so it wounds Him. But His major focus is not actually on sin; it's on indifference.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, then, calls us to repent of indifference in any kind that we have. I don't think many people here this morning are completely indifferent, but I want to get at different forms of this.

The heart of Jesus contains three different types of love, and they're all important in the heart of Jesus.

And this is not a metaphor, by the way. Jesus now in heaven has a human heart still. Jesus did not shuck His body and is now pure spirit back in heaven. No, Jesus is still human. He still has a heart. This is more than a metaphor.

So, within the heart of Jesus is divine love, because He is God.

Within His heart is also the highest form of human love, which Christians call agape. Agape is perfect, human self-giving love that isn't reciprocated. It means that you are loving

without wanting or requiring any reciprocation from the other. That's St. Maximilian Kolbe. That's the saints, in the way that they give love, sacrifice, and give self.

So, there is divine love, and the highest form of human love.

But there is also a strong emphasis in these revelations on Christ's affective or sensible love. What we mean by sensible love is that Jesus has a human heart that has all the legitimate human emotions. All the legitimate human emotions He still has.

Christ experiences joy, real human joy, even now. Christ experiences real human compassion, even now. Christ experiences actual sorrow, especially when people are far from Him. That's the indifference here, right? Christ experiences real human affection.

Think about the affection that you have for those you love most, or for your children. Christ actually experiences that human level of affection.

In all of this, the humanity of Jesus is meant to draw us in. He is not distant. He is there.

And what He asks of us is to try to live into our potential. And it matters.

It's the invitation that, as Christ has done this for us simply out of love for us, we are called to continue repentance, to exercise that muscle that is faith, and thus receive new life in the Spirit again and again and continually.

Repenting of Indifference and Entitlement

As I said, I doubt many here are indifferent, but I want to call out a form of indifference that I think really gets in the way of growing into our potential. The form of that indifference, I think, I could just call out as entitlement.

So, it's not just that I'm indifferent, but there are different types of entitlement that get in the way of us living into this.

Can you agree that our culture teaches us to be entitled? Very much, we're wired that way. This hasn't existed in every culture, time, and place in the same form. Pride does; it's a form of pride. But I think the form of entitlement we have as Americans is a particular brand that really works against us living into this.

I want to name just a few examples, and some of these convict this sinner, because I'm guilty of this as well. So, as I read these, I'd like you to do a quick examination of conscience in terms of entitlement, because I think it gets in the way of us living into this.

Entitlement might look like the following:

People should, and really need to, appreciate that my time is more important than other people's time.

- I shouldn't have to forgive this.
- I'm entitled to treat you with coldness or annoyance because I've earned it, because of my hard work.
- I should not have to share because I earned it.
- My church should cater to my preferences.
- I really shouldn't have to suffer in any way.
- I deserve this luxury because...
- I deserve this position because...
- I get to do what I want in this case because...

Dear friends in Christ, entitlement gets in the way of true humility and gratitude. I'll say it one more time: entitlement gets in the place of true humility and gratitude. Because if we feel like we deserve it, how are we going to be grateful for it? And if we're not humble enough to realize that everything we have been given is a gift, it's really hard to be generous.

So, as we look at the Sacred Heart of Jesus and His infinite love for us, let us ask that, as He has given—and that everything we have been given, we have received without cost—we may also step into the truth that we are called to give as well.

Praise be Jesus Christ.