

HOMILY LENT SUNDAY 4-B

“Genuine faith in Jesus gives eternal life”

Joke: “Never The Mane Shall Tweet”

What are you searching for? What do you want out of life?

To truly believe in Jesus is to experience eternal life.

The late Karl Rahner, well known theologian, once wrote “In the event of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we come to understand that here, in this life, all symphonies remain unfinished.”

Ron Rolheiser, well known Oblate theologian and spiritual writer, adds that not to understand those words is to risk letting restlessness become a cancer in our lives. He goes on to state that “We are congenitally over-charged and over-built for this earth, infinite spirits living in a finite situation, hearts made for union with everything and everybody, meeting only mortal persons and things. Small wonder we have problems with insatiability, daydreams, loneliness and restlessness. We are Grand Canyons without a bottom. Nothing, short of union with all that is, can ever fill in that void. To be tormented by restlessness is to be human.”

And that is precisely the predicament of Nicodemus in today’s gospel. He is a wealthy man, but unsatisfied; rich, yet experiencing a nagging emptiness. He wants more, yet nothing in this life truly fulfills him; his life is an unfinished symphony. He has a desire to change yet knows he can’t change himself. He has a searching faith, however, that brings him to Jesus, yet is afraid of what others might say, so he comes to Jesus under the cover of night.

The interchange between Jesus and Nicodemus challenges him and stretches him. He learns from Jesus that the goal of his existence is eternal life. Eternal life is the peace, joy, and justice of the Holy Spirit. It is the power of God made manifest in our lives now. Genuine faith in Jesus leads us to experience eternal life now, in a beginning sort of way.

In his words to Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the standard of Moses. In the desert, scorpions with a poisonous bite were killing the Hebrew people. They complained, and Moses prayed to God, who did not take away the problem, but gave them a way to cope with it - a bronze serpent on a standard. This bronze serpent did not have any poison in it. When the people looked at it with faith in God’s Word through Moses, they were saved and made well. Already, centuries before the time of Christ, God was preparing the Old Testament people for who Jesus would be.

This symbol foreshadowed Jesus, who had no sin, no evil, no addiction in him, and who would be stretched out on the standard of the cross. We need to look at him now, trust him completely, put our faith in him, surrender our lives to Him, and we will find the strength to deal with our problems. More, we will begin to experience eternal life, the joy, peace and justice of the Holy Spirit, and the power of God to overcome all evil in our lives, especially through love and forgiveness.

Nicodemus came to Jesus in the darkness. We also must come to Jesus by facing our own darkness. Many people avoid healing because they are afraid of what they will find if they really look at themselves. Faith helps us to be open, to let the light of Christ shine into the darkest corners of our past, our personalities, our hearts, to receive forgiveness and healing, to lead us to make amends, to apologize, to forgive any hurts. Faith leads to hope, and hope leads to love and life.

The opposite pattern is doubt, which leads to despair, and often death. An example would be an 83 year old man who committed suicide recently in one remote community. That negative pattern was probably at work in his life. What a different story that would be had that man had genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Real faith in Jesus surrenders self to Him, gives of self to others, and seeks no sign.

Lana L. Comstock wasn't abused as a child. She just felt lonely, neglected and unloved. She doesn't think it was her parents' fault necessarily. She just wasn't a happy kid. Her family did not attend church. She had never even set foot in one. One morning, playing with a new pail and shovel, she dug up a shiny cross on which were etched the words "Jesus Christ is Lord." She wasn't sure what that meant. She never showed anyone the cross, but kept it hidden as one of her prized possessions, only taking it out when no one was around. To her, it wasn't just a cross; it was a sign.

During high school, she was a typical teen. She sought out fun and trouble, but rarely got caught for it. Her life was going downhill fast, but she thought it was perfectly under control, except for the emptiness inside that she couldn't account for. Sometime during her sophomore year, she decided she wanted to know about God. Most of the church services she attended with her friends were good, but one was life-changing. As the music began to play, she was consumed, and she felt Him. He was the One she had been searching for. He was the One who had been calling her. The pastor called for those who didn't know Him to come forward. She couldn't have stopped her feet if she had wanted to. He prayed, she prayed, and her life was never again the same. She went home and wept with joy. A seemingly lifelong void was finally filled. For some reason, she is quite sure her search began the day she hit metal with her little shovel and found a cross that said, "Jesus Christ is Lord." Now she no longer has to dig to find treasures. All the treasures she'll ever need are just a prayer away.

The Eucharist is a humble meal of faith. We don't have to dig at all. With faith, simple gifts of bread and wine become for us the body and blood of Jesus. As we listen to his Word and share communion, we are looking at the standard that God gave us, and we enter a little more deeply into eternal life, the only reality that will truly satisfy us in this life.

So, put your complete trust and faith in Jesus the Christ, and begin to experience eternal life.