

## THE BODY IS NOT FOR IMMORALITY BUT FOR THE LORD

In January 1983 I was just wrapping up my doctoral work at Fordham University in the Bronx and heading back to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. I was being reassigned to teach at Cardinal Dougherty High School. Before the second semester began, after the Christmas holidays, I went on a weeklong Retreat at a Retreat House on Staten Island. It was a powerful experience for me. Not easy. Not particularly enjoyable but profoundly life-changing. In the course of the Retreat I met with the priest assigned as my Director and I had had an experience where all manner of really heavy duty, destructive and sinful experience from my life of 35 years came flooding into me.

I brought all of that to the priest. I was very upset. Very chagrined. Suddenly I had become aware of some really serious areas of my life that were not in harmony with Our Lord's gospel. It surprised me and depressed me. The priest listened attentively as I poured out my tale of woe. At the end he asked me if I had told him everything. I had. What is upsetting you the most, he asked. Is it that you did all these things? Or that you did them but didn't realize how out of line they were? Or that God would strike you down because of them? A little bit of all of the above, I responded. AND—I couldn't really believe that I had acted this way. I was in my thirties but I was like little Samuel—not really versed in the true ways of the Lord. Not really attuned to his voice even though I was already a priest.

The Director asked me if he thought that God was just finding out about all of this at this time. I thought, well, probably not. Then God has known all of this over all these years? Yes. But you? You are just realizing now what God has known all along? Well, probably. So, the priest then asked his question. What do you think is actually going on right now, in this moment when you are starting to realize how off the mark you have been at times?

Could it be that Our Lord, who has known all of this all along, has now sensed that you are ready to deal with it? And that, perhaps he has actually shielded you from the fuller realization of all of this because you would not have been able to handle it before? But that now he sensed you were more serious? More open to the deeper truth in question? Could it be that all this negativity cascading down upon you in this moment is actually Our Lord at work in your life because he knows you and that you are becoming more able, and more ready, to deal with some of this and to make the necessary changes in your life? That this terrible experience is actually a great moment of grace?

My friends, I didn't know. I didn't realize. I thought I knew. I thought I realized. But I was busy living in my own little world. It turns out that that Retreat experience was just what that priest said it was. It was a real grace-filled moment. It was God revealing to me. And the Director said to me, "Think about this. So much of this stuff that was going on in your life and which was detrimental to you, the Lord knew about, but continued to bless you, grace you, work through you, abide in you—all the while patiently waiting until you had grown ready to deal with some important issues. All the while you did not know, he did know—and loved you anyway.

With all that as a backdrop listen to today's second reading from Paul to the Corinthians. The body is not for immorality. (It is for immortality, but not immorality. And there really is such a thing as immorality. Living in an immoral way.) The body—is for the Lord. Your body is a member of the body of Christ. You are joined to him. You share his Spirit. Your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. The immoral person sins against his own body.

Ask yourself. Is there anything immoral going on in your life at the present time? Could you be engaged in living a way that is immoral, not good, not in harmony with the truth revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Could this be so even though the culture all around you says that the way you are living is perfectly fine or at the very least nobody else's business but your own. Or that these actions are simply yours to decide if they are okay or not?

My friends, there is a meaning to things. It is assigned by God. There is a purpose and a proper order, a proper way for things to act. We can change or alter or subvert. But that does not mean that this is good or moral. It is possible to do many things but that really isn't the issue. Is it good and right and in harmony with God? Those are the issues.

In the Gospel for today those early disciples of Jesus were changed when they met him. They did not want to live any more the way they had been living. That is what happens to us when Jesus begins to become real to us, when we have an encounter of some kind, when something is revealed to us even something difficult for us to deal with. When we come to the moment when we no longer want to live only by our own lights but by what has been revealed by Jesus of Nazareth our lives start to change. And get better. We begin to do the good. To live in a way in harmony with what God has designed. We begin to live morally. It is really good for us to do this. It isn't just God telling us what to do. It is God caring enough about us to take the time and reveal at the right moment something we need to address—and change. With his help. With his grace. This is especially true in this time of the pandemic.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.