

CREATE A CLEAN HEART IN ME, O GOD!

You will notice that the statues are covered in purple this weekend. Why is that? It is a pretty ancient custom. Veneration of the saints is a strong part of our Catholic faith. We do not worship the saints. We worship God alone. But we venerate the saints, these ordinary men and women who lived on earth as we do and sought to live a worthwhile life as we do. They were approachable when they lived on earth. They now live in the kingdom of God. And they are still approachable. We can talk to them. We can seek their assistance and support and their encouragement. This help is important to us as we strive to live out our faith as they did.

The first three weeks of Lent focus our attention on living a Godly and moral way in this world. The saints are helps to us. But the last three weeks of Lent the focus changes from our own living a moral life to the person of Jesus who has won the victory over sin and death. We want no one to distract us. We want no thing to distract us. So we veil our statues and focus our attention on the Lord Jesus. And why is that?

We get our answer from the responsorial Psalm for today. “Create a clean heart in me, O God.” Why do we pray that? Why does the psalmist write a psalm about that? Because that is where we are without Jesus in our lives. Our hearts are not clean and we so desire them to be made clean. And you and I both know, that having tried as often as we have and as intensely as we have, we have not ever really been successful in creating our own hearts as clean hearts. To do this is something beyond us, beyond our ability, beyond our capacity. BUT not beyond what Jesus can do and does do if we allow Him to do so.

And right there is the rub. It is not so simple sometimes. We are persons with a good deal of complexity to us. Of course, we want Jesus to create a new heart within us. Of course, we want Our Lord to restore us to our original innocence. And we ask for it and we pray for it. BUT. Sometimes as we delve more deeply into our relationship with Christ we begin to tap the brakes. Hold on there.

In the Gospel today some people who were not Jews but rather Greeks come to his apostles and say very simply: “We would like to see Jesus.” Of course they would. There is something in me that would like to see Jesus too. Isn’t that what would also please you? How does that happen. Well the prophet Jeremiah speaks about how God desired to make a new covenant with his people. And that he wanted to forgive their sins in such a way that they would no longer remember them. That sound great. God would send someone to accomplish this. His Messiah.

We who believe in Jesus of Nazareth believe that Jesus is that very Messiah sent by God. So, what happened? The letter to the Hebrews identifies Jesus as the very beloved Son of God who has taken on our flesh. He prayed to the Father. He called out to God. He sought to be saved from death—as we all seek to be saved from death. And his prayer was heard but he died any way. Not only died, but suffered. And Hebrews says that Jesus learned obedience from what he

suffered. He learned that as a human person. As a divine person, the Son of the Father, he always was obedience to the Father's will. But there is more. He suffers fearful and excruciating pain—the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, the scourging at the pillar, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross to Calvary. His very crucifixion on Golgotha. He embodies his own parable. He becomes the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies in order to yield a rich harvest.

He is broken in the process. And he is broken because he loves us so. His love for us is so profound that we begin to realize that it has this power and unleashes this power that can do things—even in us. Especially in us. We begin to realize that his love sustains us. His love nourishes us at the very core of our being. His love feeds us. Like good bread. Ah, the Eucharist begins to make sense. AND—he does all this for us. For us. For you. For me. All of that. For me.

I don't know if I can stand it. I don't know if I can handle it. I mean, “Lord I want you to create a clean heart in me but did you have to do all that? Go through all that? For me? To free me? To cleanse my heart? I don't know if I can handle that O Lord. I feel so indebted to you. I feel so beholden to you. I feel like I have to repay you for this. And I can't. I can't possibly repay you for all you have done for me.”

So I am faced with two possibilities. First, realizing I can never pay you back for this, for asking me to allow you to be God precisely in the way you want to be God for me—I must turn away from you and your grace and your love. Because it is too much for me. OR, second, I can surrender to you and accept all that you have done for me. I will accept that you will love me the way You want to love me and in the manner you want to show that love. I will let you be God for me. And I will allow your grace to enter into me, displace whatever does not belong in me. I will allow you to create my heart anew, O Christ. And with that new heart, I will live for you. As best I can, every day of my life.

My friends, that is where we are today. We plea to God to save us from suffering because we hate it. Instead, he chooses to come to us and share our suffering, entering into it with us and for us and thus unleashing its truly cleansing and transforming power. That is who our God is. Will we let God be that kind of God for us? Today?

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