NOW IS THE TIME

A Personal Reflection for the Fifth Week of Groups

We can tend to make our Christian faith abstract- a list of things to be believed and a certain way of behaving, and that is the whole of it. But God is not an abstraction. He is a Father that desires for you, his child, to come back home to Him. And so, like the story of the Prodigal Son, he waits for you, always scanning the horizon for the first hint of your return, and will run out to meet you with an embrace of restoring love.

I want to give you a few Scripture verses to think about here.

“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that whoever believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life.”

The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

…but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Do you see God pursuing you in these verses? Can you grasp the heart of the Father in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ? God’s love, not his hate, sent his Son into this world, taking on a full human nature through the “Yes” of the Virgin Mary so that we could see him, touch him, talk to him, hear him… but also so that we could attack him, deny him, lay hold of him, scourge him, crown him with thorns and pin his flesh to a cross. Love gave himself to us, and rather than receive that love, we took his life.

But this was the purpose for which he came! He knew what we humans are capable of, but even more than that, he knew what it would take to destroy sin, death and the devil’s reign of terror over us. Jesus didn't become man so that he could tell us some wise things. He came to be your Savior, to save you. And that’s you as in, second person, singular. You alone.

Did you know that if you were the only person on earth, Jesus would have died for your sin? The Catholic Church uses the phrase “Each and Every” to describe who Jesus died for. “Each and every person”. All of us, each individual. You.
HOMECOMING

God is pursuing you even now. He is looking at you through the eyes of His Son and desperately wants you to fully come home. Now. Not tomorrow, nor when you get your career established or when you get your family drama sorted out. Now. As in, while you are reading these words your Father is scanning the horizon of your heart to see if you will definitively move towards Him. He’s got the Welcome Party ready to go upon your return, He only needs the honored guest to walk home.

How do you start walking home to your Father? The first step is what this entire Lent has been about and all of these sessions, as well: Repent.

Repentance is a deeply personal thing. You about what is “that One thing” in your life keeping you from God. Acknowledging this One Thing exists is a huge first step. Creating a battle plan to uproot it is the necessary second step. In the “Enemies of the Heart” session we talked directly about how, if we spent one year smashing this One Thing’s grip on our life, we would be truly free.

But this freedom is not earned. It is received through the grace of Jesus Christ. You cannot do this on your own. Jesus’ grace is required for your heart and life to really change. Why? Because if you do it on your own willpower, provided that you can even do that, pride will creep in and will harden your heart with arrogance.

Morality isn’t the point of being a Christian. That might sound shocking, but morality serves a purpose that is greater than itself: union with God in Christ Jesus. Morality means sharing in the virtues of Jesus Christ. The rules and commandments are not meant to handcuff our lives, but draws us closer to Christ to the point where we can say with Saint Paul, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” It’s a life worthy of the Gospel.

So repentance is an act of trust. Have your discussions, prayers and lessons led you to the point where you can trust God’s love and mercy enough to surrender your sins? Can you trust Jesus enough right now with your life that you can surrender your plans and your control over to Him? If the Father is pursuing you, if the Son died for you, if the Spirit is poured out for you, what fear or anxiety could you possibly have in hiding from God? Turn your heart over to Him. Cast all of your sins upon Him. Confess now, in the privacy of your heart, and give it over to Christ Jesus.

As Catholics we weren’t really taught how to repent, only how to go to Confession. Repentance should drive us to the confessional, instead of the confessional replacing it. Speak your sins, your One Thing, your fears, doubts and anxieties to your Father in the name of Jesus Christ right now and ask him to take them away from you forever.
Ask Jesus Christ to be the undisputed King of your heart. Repentance is about jumping off your throne so that Christ can sit there instead of you. Repentance is about honesty, a sober judgment of where you stand before God. As Saint Francis of Assisi once powerfully said, “What a man is before God, that he is, and nothing else.”

I write these words to you to help you push the RESET button on your life. It is time to embrace God for real and not just play at religion. God is standing at the door of your heart and is knocking. He promises us that if we hear his voice and open the door, he will enter. He will never force his way. God humbles himself yet again by knocking and patiently waiting.

“God is patient, slow to anger and rich in kindness.” Put more earnestly, St Paul charges his Corinthian church, “…do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

If you are ready to dive into the grace and life of Jesus Christ, which is an intensely personal act, I want you to pray this prayer. If you aren’t ready, I want you to spend a few days thinking about this decision and maybe spend some time with the Scripture verses in the beginning and read the story of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

Jesus, my Lord and my God,
my Savior and my Redeemer,
I’m tired of the lie of trying
to be good enough for God.

I reject the false hopes that wealth, honor, power and pleasure have been in my Past. I repent of all the idols I’ve run after and especially of that one thing in my life keeping me from knowing and loving You.
I choose You alone, Jesus Christ, to be my Present and my Future.
I choose You alone, Jesus Christ to be my Hope and my Life.

I am inviting You into my heart.
I am placing my faith in You alone.
I am asking You to take all my sin, and replace it with Your grace.
For Your grace is sufficient for me, and Your love is better than life.
In Your matchless Name I pray.
Amen.