

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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I recall an experience that occurred during my ministry. One day, I was called to anoint a sick person who was suffering from a terminal illness. He was about to enter his final moments. After an initial talk, I asked him: “Would you like to make your confession?” He said with a whisper: “Father, I was not practicing my faith for several years, I forgot even the formula for making the Confession.” Without hesitation, I explained how to make a good Sacrament of Confession, and he went through his Confession. The penance given were three “Hail Marys”. Before I could begin the absolution he said: “Father I would like to do my penance now, before the final absolution.” I agreed, and he started the prayer: “Hail Mary full of Grace ...” and nothing else followed. In silence, we both looked at each other. Then I understood that he was trying to remember the prayer after not reciting it for so many years. I asked him: “Would you mind if I help you to pray?” He consented, and we prayed the “Hail Marys” together. As we slowly prayed the prayers, his tears flowed freely down. After the confession, with tears, he said: “I was an active Catholic a long way back in my childhood, but later I left my faith and I don’t remember when was the last time I prayed the Hail Mary or any other prayer.” Later, he shared his memories of being an Altar Servant, and participating actively in the Holy Mass in those days. I told him: “I am so happy that you have some good memories of your faith journey.” I thanked Jesus, in my heart, for keeping the seed of faith in the innermost depths of this man’s heart.

Today’s Gospel passage, likewise, teaches us about having this seed of faith in us, and the importance of it growing into a deep-rooted tree of faith in our lives. A faith that is ready to face even the loss of lives for Christ’s sake. The magnificent Temple that was built by human hands will be destroyed and will vanish without any trace; but the temple that the disciples built up within their hearts will never cease under any condition. In the passage, Jesus invited his listeners to build the Temple of God; God’s Spiritual Kingdom within their hearts with spiritual vigilance in all circumstances. Being vigilant is important to



keep the faith alive. Many things can happen: like war, earthquakes, famine, plagues, persecution, and even rejection from their own families; but as faithful followers, the disciples should keep their faith firm and alive.

St. Luke wrote this Gospel passage during the persecution and trouble that the Lucan community was facing and undergoing at the time. Perseverance and continuing to be life-witnesses were what Luke expected from them. Luke maintained that the consolation through suffering and life's challenges is the assurance of one thing: they are in the hands of God. "... not a hair of your head will perish..." That is the assurance; that God will be present with the disciples in all their sufferings. As we know, many of our brothers and sisters in different parts of the world undergo sufferings only because they believe in Jesus. Let us keep all of them in our hearts and raise our prayers for them.

According to St. Paul, to keep Jesus alive, each follower of Jesus should live a dynamic life; to work tirelessly to live the Gospel within the community. This is done by keeping oneself away from idleness and being busy-bodies. *Idleness* and *Sloth*, are deadly sins. In extreme forms of laziness, one can be led into a state of total inaction. Spiritual apathy, an indifference to prayer and the sacraments, brings a feeling of having no meaning in God, life, religion, morality, and so on. The word *Apathy* comes from the Greek word *A Pathos*, the literal meaning of which is "without feeling." The contextual meaning of apathy is "I don't care." Spiritual apathy is deadly for our souls. So a person who has spiritual apathy will start to think and say: "I don't care about anything: not God, not the sacraments, not personal prayer, not anyone in my life. I just don't care!"

Jesus teaches us in the Gospel passage today that through endurance can one only regain one's soul; drawing focus on the importance of being a persistent faithful believer. Through the ethics of being engaged in work against idleness, St. Paul teaches us its importance from the Christian point of view. The Christian approach to work emphasizes that having a healthy, good work ethic is a moral and spiritual matter. It is not just about having a job, but about the attitude behind how one works and the purpose behind it, which should always be to honour God and to serve others.

In his Encyclical, *LABOREM EXERCENS*, in English *Through Work*, St. John Paul II teaches that “human labour is a source of dignity and a participation in God's creative work, not just a punishment.” The Pope viewed all the work that human beings engage in as a participation in God’s ongoing work of creation and redemption. From a Pauline perspective, work is a call to live a ‘life of purpose’. The purpose of the Christian life, according to St. Paul, consists in ‘forming Christ in oneself’. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul wrote: “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you ...” (Galatians 4:19).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us build the temple of God in our hearts with a diligent and profound faith that is deeply rooted in Jesus the Cornerstone, that cannot be destroyed by anything in any situation or challenge of life.

Let us become active builders and productive people of the Kingdom of Heaven in our hearts and in our surroundings.