

Homily Jan 22, 2023

In the name of God, Amma-Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

(We're working on getting a new sound system, have no fears.)

Stunning! John the Baptist is arrested, and Jesus begins proclaiming the same thing!

The last thing you should be saying, right? The last thing. And he picks up the message and goes on proclaiming it. Return to your right minds. Return to God. Return to the heart of our path.

There is no way to peace....Peace is the way. That's our calling. It's not clear, is it, that peace is evolving from who we are. It was initiated by God in our baptisms. And all of us joyfully remember Gia's baptism last week. Hey, hey!

Quite a number of you shared with me how you were touched by her baptism, hearing those questions, seeing this ancient rite, and especially that moment when I asked her three times, "To what are you called?" That's what the whole baptismal celebration is all about--the pledge of God to be with us for a lifetime, and to stir up the most important thing about you is who you are.

Jim Gunshinan doesn't need to be Bill Carmel--we've already got a Bill. What we need is Jim! And God's entire universe is filled with people and creatures of distinction for whom it is God's joy and delight when we become ourselves.

Most of us also learn during the path of life that the scariest person we ever meet is--our self. That's why it's so hard. That's why Baptism is initiating us with that pledge and promise of God, so that we don't forget.

Say your name when I point at you... [various members of the congregation]

To what are you called?

To what are you called?

To what are you called?

When the pain of the world meets the joy of our heart--that's our calling. The calling is who you are. It is a lifetime of discovery. That's the most important thing about you. It may be your vocation. It may not. It may change over the course of a lifetime. We're always trying to discern to what are we being called now--to become Gia, to become Love, to become 'Agitation'. All of these are the faces of God.

Suzuki Roshi, founder of the Zen Center in San Francisco was once asked, and I have often felt this kind of response in my own heart when people (you know folks who haven't been here) ask me about the people of Peace. They say, 'Well, what is your congregation like?' Suzuki Roshi said about the followers of the Zen path at San Francisco's zendo, he said 'Them, these people? They're brilliant, each one of them, utterly brilliant...until they open their mouths!'

Laughter, humor, hilarity is the most profound sign of God, and where there is no laughter, there is no God. People in touch with that heartfelt, deep desire for truth, for the questioning of, manifesting, who we are, and how we are in this world, tend to laugh a lot, oftentimes falling down [laughing] at our own selves, right? Because God is with us in this venture--where we succeed and where we fail. The calling for whatever we do comes from who we are.

Now, we tend to assess ourselves according to our progress that we've made along the path of 'accomplishments'. This is why this society talks so much about busyness. *'I must have value because I am so busy. That way I don't have to think--and everybody else is busy like me.'* Right?

And we can ignore the question, *'Who are you becoming in the beauty of your soul whom God has created?'* Spiritual wisdom counsels us—*'Go easier. Just go easy. Give it a break. All this non-stop stuff--is it making you a better person? Or just a faster person?'* Because you are far more than just a production/manufacturing machine. And even if you do it well, and make it to retirement, and collapse there...Congratulations! That's not enough. That's sad. That's sad.

I've taken great counsel from this passage from Thomas Merton-- a letter to his friend, but truthfully, it's a letter to all of us. I'm just sharing one paragraph of what I think is stunning wisdom about our calling.

Friends. *"Do not depend on the hope of results. (How is that for an opening line!) Do not depend on the hope of results. For when you are doing this sort of work, the work that you've taken on in your calling to manifest compassion and truth and what matters to you, when you do this sort of work, which is essentially discipling work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless, and often achieve no results at all. In fact, it is likely that all of your efforts may create the opposite of what you expect."*

Anybody had that experience? *I invested so much. I gave my heart and soul. And it went the opposite.* (It's a whole bunch of heads nodding in here. Why is that?)

And he said, *"It's as you get used to this idea (as if it was a massage, you know) as you get used to this that all of your efforts may achieve nothing, or go nowhere, or result in the opposite, as you get used to it, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, on the rightness, on the truth, of what you are doing and living. And there too a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea or ideals, and you work more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. And in the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything."* Thomas Merton

No need to save the world. Take it off your list for this week. Just lighten up the corner where you live. Make it shine where you are. Illuminate that zone as best you can. I am, and I know you are too, fed up with all the noise, and commotion, and the slogans, and the shouting going on

around this. And it just keeps getting louder and louder. And it is so emptying--the swamp of negativity, defeat, despair. How shall we live?

And so many people in our own lives, even people inside of our own families, some of them are just so irritating, aren't they? (*I mean haven't you reached the max yet?*) They push our buttons. They shove us into these reactive minds, and moods. And, we have to remember and return again, and again, and again, to the wisdom *that if we are going to see the virtue in others, we need a very calm mind.*

So, it's crucial that we return to our right minds, that we return to the generative energy of our calling that helps clarify who we are, and what we're about. It is so crucial--to be aligned with our calling, so that our thinking and our heart space are not focused on goals outside of ourselves, or comparing ourselves with other beings, or trying to prove who we are through the value of our work. So, it's driving us so much of the time, isn't it? We're proving ourselves. *I measure up somehow. I'm busy or I've accomplished so much!* But on the inside it isn't satisfying. It's never enough, because it's not speaking to who we are, what we're longing for, what we want to manifest in this world.

So, we get to release it here. As people of faith that the good comes not from us so much as from our trusting the flow of the spirit. We must live by the love of what we will never see. Live by the love that--you know in your heart--things that we will never see. That's faith.

The great thing is to live, to manifest who you are--to what are you called? It's the most complex thing you'll face in a lifetime. It's also the most delightful: 'To what are you called?'

Saint Irenaeus, eighteen hundred years ago, said, "*The glory of God is the human being fully alive.*" Oh, dear God in heaven! Don't you wish that had become the foundation of Christianity for 2000 years?

We are simply saying that glory of God is Moriah fully alive, is Austin coming to life. It's Katherine living herself in the joy and the beauty of what she knows. It's John trying to agitate the rest of us...because he knows how to do it. It's his gift. That's the glory of God fully alive.

Why waste ourselves on delusions? Yes, disappointments and frustrations will continue to overwhelm, but our hope is not in our accomplishments. It's in the God who makes something good of everything we do well--and everything we fail. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything. Enjoy it!

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.