

Fr. Roger J. Landry

Sacred Heart Retreat Center of the Carmelites of the Sacred Heart of Los Angeles, Alhambra, CA

Saturday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time, Year II

Memorial of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, OCD

November 8, 2014

Phil 4:10-19, Ps 112, Lk 16:9-15

Encountering Jesus in Spiritual Poverty and in the Sacred Indwelling

- One of the most important decisions we need to make on a retreat is whether we're going truly to live as Jesus lives or whether we're going to live the way everyone else does. As we ponder throughout this retreat how we're called to encounter Christ and respond to his question, "Who do you say that I am?," today he tells us that to embrace him means to detach ourselves from worldly things. We cannot serve, he tells us, both God and mammon. We have to make a choice between God and money and the things money can buy, between serving God or being enslaved to the things of this world.
- Yesterday Jesus told the Parable of the Unjust Steward, the employee of the rich man who was reported to him for squandering his property. He was given a chance to prepare the books before getting dismissed and he began to call in the debtors to the Master and reduce what they owed. What he was essentially doing was cutting out his commission, because the way commissions worked in the ancient world was that if you owed 50 measures of olive oil as rent as a tenant farmer, that's what you'd owe the Master but the steward could add on another 20 or 50 or even 100 as his commission. Taxes worked the same way. One of the reasons why this steward was probably reported for squandering his master's property was because he was, like Fannie and Freddie, he was probably making terrible business deals, allowing people on the Master's fields who weren't producing and thereby squandering the Master's property. But after the rich man in the parable saw what his dishonest steward had done, he surprisingly commended him for acting prudently, for seeking to save his life rather than to squeeze out some extra money. And Jesus drew a moral lesson for us all that immediately leads into today's Gospel: "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than the children of light."
- Jesus wants us to be as wise in the spiritual realm as greedy businessmen are in the material realm. He tells us to use all our material resources to "make friends," to care for the poor, so that when all earthly mammon turns out to be no more valuable than monopoly money, the poor will take care of us forever by vouching for our charity, for having been the recipients of our care when they were hungry, thirsty, naked, estranged, imprisoned or sick. Jesus calls us to be faithful in the little things of using our material resources so that we can be entrusted with the true wealth of his eternal kingdom.
- But we have to make a choice and this choice is a hard one today, because as Pope Francis has been stressing since the beginning of his Pontificate, there is in our world today a renewed and "ferocious" idolatry of money, a revitalization of the worship of the ancient golden calf, a consumerism that is, basically, consuming us and leading us to consume the weak and those on the extremes of life. "How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?," he asks in his apostolic exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel." In Brazil last year, he stated in a television interview, "The world in which we're living has fallen into a ferocious idolatry of money. There is a world wide policy dominated by the pursuit of money. ... When this world of the ferocious idolatry of money reigns, everything focuses for the most part in the center. Those on the extremes of society [the young who don't work yet, seniors who are too old to work, and the handicapped who can't work] are badly taken care of, neglected and discarded." He said that worship of mammon leads to a loss of faith in God and a loss of love for others. "Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God" (EG 57). Idolatry of money leads to a hardening of the heart toward God and others. We begin to place our faith, hope and love in the things of this world. We put institutional concerns about spiritual ones. We begin to obsess about the bank accounts, houses, jewelry and other material things we'll leave to the next generation rather than the legacy of faith.
- If you don't think he's right with regard to how money is ruling the hearts not just of the non-Christians but Christians, too, just ask yourself what would have happened on this retreat if word got out among the

women of your parishes that everyone coming to make spiritual exercises here would have received a million dollars. We know that this chapel would be standing room only now! It would be packed even if all that would be happen would be a raffle for one retreatant to win a million. But all we are giving here is GOD in the Holy Eucharist and there are many who made excuses not to come who would have been here if there were something “really important” that concerned money.

- If we're truly going to encounter the Lord Jesus on his terms rather than ours, if we're really going to live a life together with him and say to him and to the whole world that he is our Messiah, that he is our Lord, that he is our Savior, that he is the Son of the Living God, then we need to believe in and act on his words. We need to make the choice to serve him rather than mammon. We need to make him the pearl of great price sacrificing everything else in our life to obtain. We need to make for him the choice that the Rich Young Man didn't, and that's to use our material resources for the care of others so that we can be free to follow him, rather than choose, like he did, our stuff over our Savior.
- In today's first reading, St. Paul praises the Philippians for doing just that, for sacrificing for him and for what he was doing. He said that he didn't need it, because he had learned how to go without, but he was “rejoicing greatly” because of the “profit that accrues to your account.” They were using the things of the world to advance the kingdom Paul was announcing. They were serving God with the material resources they had rather than using material resources for their own aggrandizement. In doing so, they were becoming rich in what matters to God. The wise man, God reminds us through today's psalm, “lavishly gives to the poor; his generosity shall endure for ever,” because the poor are our bankers, and to give to them is essentially to give to God. That's what the Philippians were doing and that's why St. Paul was so happy, not because he wanted their mammon, but he wanted their souls to use their mammon for God and others.
- Making this conversion from the worship of stuff to the worship of God is difficult. It requires faith. But St. Paul seeks to strengthen us to make that act of faith, telling us today what he himself discovered, “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” If you're attached to things, if you place your heart in a material treasure rather than lift that heart to God, God will give you the grace of conversion, because you can do all things in the Lord who strengthens you.
- One who was able to do great things for God in a short span of life, who was strengthened by his grace to choose to serve Him rather than mammon, to be trustworthy in little things, and who was as a result entrusted by God with the “true wealth” is the great Carmelite Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity whom the Church celebrates today. What a great joy it is to be able to celebrate this proper feast today with her Carmelite Sisters here in Alhambra.
- She wasn't born a saint. She needed God's help and strength to overcome a ferocious temper. Her mother told her that she would either become a terror or a saint because of her strong personality. A big change took place with her first confession at the age of seven. It brought her what she called her “conversion” and from that point forward she vowed to become a “sweet, patient and obedient daughter.” God was strengthening her to make a conversion from being served and placated to serving and pleasing God and others. After she received Jesus in Holy Communion at the age of 11, a further change happened in her, as she began to treasure the incredible gift of Jesus within her. She started to prioritize the kingdom and use all that she had been given for God. A great pianist and award winner at the Dijon Conservatory, she started to use her musical abilities for God's glory, by singing in two Church choirs. She would eventually say that she wanted to do all things for the praise of God's glory and she began early, teaching Catechism so that others would share the same holy desire. She lived just 250 yards from a Discalced Carmelite Monastery and she wanted to enter there in order to serve God with everything she had, a response to a calling she discerned God had given her. Her mother resisted for several years, but finally relented. Elizabeth entered at 21, where she would praise God and serve him and others for five years, until she would die of Addison's disease at the age of 26.
- She sought to be faithful to God in all of the little things, saying, “I find Him everywhere while doing the wash as well as while praying.” She became known as the “prophet of the presence of God.” She sought to unite everything to God, knowing that in grace God was dwelling within her so that she could do all things in Him who strengthened her. Blessed Elizabeth's beautiful prayer about God's dwelling within us in grace is contained for us in paragraph 260 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church describing how not only is

God's plan for us to enter into the perfect unity of the Trinity in heaven, but to become a dwelling place of God now, following through on Jesus' promise that if we love him and keep his word, the Father will love us and the Trinity will come to us and make a dwelling place within us.

- "O my God," she wrote, "Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest. May I never abandon you there, but may I be there, whole and entire, completely vigilant in my faith, entirely adoring, and wholly given over to your creative action."
- She knew that "each minute" was an opportunity to rejoice in God's loving presence, which wasn't static but "creative," as he was seeking to transform her more and more into his image. It was a foretaste of heaven. The Blessed Trinity taught her she could do all things in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit strengthening her within and that nothing — except her choosing to run away from God through serious sin — could separate her from the love of God, including suffering. She accepted her own immense sufferings as a gift from God to bring about a union with Christ on the Cross and to allow her to join Christ in the salvation of souls, making up what was lacking in his sufferings for the sake of his body the Church. She wasn't afraid to die, saying, "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life," because in this world, within her, she was regularly communing with that same Light, Love and Life.
- Her work in heaven is very much something that the reform of the Church needs today. You remember that six days before he was elected the 266th Peter, the future Pope Francis said to his brother Cardinals that the next Pope had to be a man who, from the contemplation and adoration of Christ could lead the Church out of herself to the existential peripheries where as a Mother she could carry out the sweet and comforting task of evangelizing. Before Blessed Elizabeth died, she said, "I think that in Heaven my mission will be to draw souls by helping them to *go out of themselves* in order to cling to God by a wholly simple and loving movement, and to keep them in this great silence within which will *allow God to communicate Himself to them and to transform them into Himself.*" Her work is to pray that we will be kept by God in the silence of prayerful union, that will transform us progressively into God, so that we will by the power of the Holy Spirit and following the command of Jesus go out of ourselves to bring others into that same communion with God and with us. She's praying for us and the whole Church now.
- The way that Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity grew in her awareness of the Indwelling of the Trinity and her cooperation with the three persons was through the daily reception of the Holy Eucharist. Her very name Elizabeth means "House of God" and she grasped that that house, that dwelling place she was, was meant to be a tabernacle. She wrote to a young friend who had just made her First Communion, "If He came this morning into your little heart, it was not to pass through it and go away, but to remain there always." Jesus doesn't come to visit us in Holy Communion, but to stay, and she treasured that divine Guest. She wrote a profound poem to celebrate the seventh anniversary of her own First Holy Communion in which she said, "When Jesus made in me His dwelling place, when God took possession of my heart, so well that since that hour, since that mysterious colloquy, that divine and delicious meeting, I have aspired to nothing else but to give my life in order to return a bit of His great love to the Beloved of the Eucharist who reposed in my feeble heart, inundating it with all of his favors." The "colloquy" to which she is alluding is the exchange of persons that happens in the consummation of Christ's spousal union with his Bride the Church in Holy Communion, a divine and delightful encounter, and it led her to seek in return to give her life to the "Beloved of the Eucharist." That love was what led her to choose to be rich through uniting herself in a perpetual encounter with the spiritually poor Christ, who thought he was rich became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity was one of the richest people of her generation in the only wealth that matters and now she's experiencing riches even greater. May we be as wise as she in making the choice during this retreat to divest ourselves of attachments to all mammon so as to obtain with her the Pearl of Great Price, that abiding Treasure we're about to consume.