

The Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time February 6, 2022

It is so easy in life to lose sight of what's most important. Our days are so busy that we often forget what the point of it all is. This is true of our daily lives but it is also true of our lives of faith. We can get so caught up in all the rules that we find ourselves going through the motions without any appreciation for what it is we are doing.

In today's second reading, St Paul reminds the Corinthians - and us - what we are about. He writes, "I am reminding you, brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you indeed received and in which you also stand. Through it you are also being saved..." What is the Christian life about then? It is about preaching and living the gospel. The Church exists to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. Each of us who are baptized exists to participate in the Church's mission of spreading the good news to the ends of the earth.

There are two meanings to the word "gospel". We use the word to refer to the four books of the New Testament that preserve for us the teaching and life of Jesus Christ. They are the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That is the use of the word "gospel" that we are probably most familiar with.

But, there is another meaning to "gospel". This word is used throughout the New Testament to describe the good news about Jesus Christ who died for us and rose from the dead. It is the basic Christian message which the apostles proclaimed in the early days of the Church. St Paul sums up this basic gospel message in today's second reading. "...Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." The gospel is, in essence, the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection.

It is so important for us to constantly keep this in mind. Everything we do as a community of believers must be centered upon the gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is why we gather for Sunday Mass: to proclaim His death, to profess His resurrection, in the hope that He will come again. It is the reason why we serve the poor because, by dying on the cross, Christ identified with the poor. It is the reason why we celebrate the Sacraments - so that we can be touched by the healing and saving power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

When we preach the gospel, miracles happen. It is the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection that changes hearts and gives power to all that we do as a community of believers. When we preach Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead, the Holy Spirit moves in the hearts and souls of those who hear us. The gospel message has the power to save as St Paul reminds us in today's second reading - "through [the gospel] you are being saved."

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During the Catholic Prayer Breakfast held in Washington D.C. last year, Catholic author and scripture scholar, Jeff Cavins, described the five basic points that make up the whole gospel message. They are: 1) God loves you and has an amazing plan for your life; 2) Sin has radically disrupted that plan; 3) Jesus loves you so much that He died for you; 4) Jesus calls us to repent of our sin and radically reorient our life to him; 5) we must be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit and join His family, the Church.

Let us look at each of these points briefly so that we can incorporate them into our understanding of our faith and share them with others.

First, God loves you and has an amazing plan for your life. Each of us was created by God out of love. No one was born accidentally. Rather, everyone was willed into being by God Himself. There is nothing we can do that will make God fall out of love for us. He has a plan for our lives that is greater than we can ever imagine and it is never too late for us to follow His will for us.

Second, sin has radically disrupted that plan. Sin is our rejection of God and His love. When we sin, we choose something less than God to be the center of our lives. We are so much less than what God desires for us when we choose our own way over His way. And what's worse is that, the more we sin, the more we become slaves to sin, unable to break out of harmful lifestyles, attitudes, and actions.

Third, the good news is that Jesus loved us so much that He died for our sins. Because of His death on the cross, Jesus broke the power of sin over us and has extended to us the Father's forgiveness. No matter what we may have done in the past, we can find mercy and forgiveness through the blood that Jesus shed on the cross.

Fourth, we must repent of our sins and radically reorient our lives to the word of God. This turning away from sin and learning how to live as children of God is a lifelong process. But it is one that we must undertake if God's saving power is going to be active in our lives.

Finally, we must be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit and become a member of His family, the Church. None of us are called to live this relationship with Jesus on our own. Rather, we are called into the Church, to learn from each other, and to participate together in the sacraments.

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The gospel message can be summed up in these five points. God loves us. Sin has broken our relationship with God. But, that relationship with God is restored through the death of Jesus. Because of that, we must turn away from sin and learn to do God's will. And we must be baptized so that we can become part of the Church which is the family of God. This simple message is what we are about as a Church. It is the reason for everything we do. If we embrace it in our own lives and share it with others, the Holy Spirit will work wonders through us.

In faith then, following the example of St Paul and the other apostles, let us share this good news with others so our Church can continue to grow and transform the world in the power of God's love.