

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Praise and Worship
June 2, 2019
Romans 8:31-39
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What then can we say to all this? (Rm. 8:31)

“All This’ refers to all God has done in Christ for us. And what has happened to us? Our resurrection has begun. The Holy Spirit lives in us. Our spirits are alive because our resurrection has begun in them. The resurrection of our bodies, Paul says, will come later. Rm. 8:10-11. Because of this there is a struggle going on in us and around us. God is on our side in this struggle against sin and sorrow and hardship.

If the Son and the Spirit have joined forces at the direction of the Father (Think Avengers/Infinity War) is it reasonable that any creature or power can rob us of our inheritance? Let’s look at what God has done for us in Christ.

Part One- What did Jesus do?

“He... handed him over” (Rm. 8:32)

This refers to the free will offering of Jesus. It refers to the Passion, Death and Resurrection; the whole event which we call the Cross. Francis Martin: “When we look at the Cross take time to ask ‘Why did that man have to die?’ It is not sin we see when we look at the cross it is Love. We see God’s love for humanity that he would rescue us and make a way for us to be reconciled to himself. Also, we see a man’s love for God. In Jesus Christ for the first time a human heart offered Perfect Love to God. Love placed Jesus on the Cross not the Romans or the Jews. Jesus freely took up his cross. In John 14:31 Jesus tells his disciples, “The world must know that I love the Father”. It is this perfect love that meets the just requirements of the Law for all of us. In the act of love in which Jesus died he reached out both ways- to the Father offering perfect sinless obedience- and to us offering forgiveness and reconciliation with God. So the next time you are asked the meaning of the crucifix you wear or display there is an opportunity to talk about this great meeting of love toward us and toward God on our behalf.

This is a great wave of love. Not a breaker but a tsunami of love. What can we say to all this love? “This tidal wave is great, but I am going to keep paddling to shore.” Or “I appreciate all Jesus has done in loving God and crediting me but I would like to earn it myself. I’m a good person, I don’t really need Jesus or Faith too much. I can stand on my own two feet before God.” It can’t be done! Isn’t this what the Commandments prove? Isn’t that the point of Romans 7. “The good I want to do, I just can’t”. But Jesus fulfilled all goodness for us. In Christ goodness overflows. The love and obedience that Christ offered to the Father on our behalf is abundant. Abundant like the twelve baskets left over after the multiplication of the loaves. Abundant like the gallons and gallons of wine at the wedding of Cana!

It is only because he who loved God perfectly and abundantly *lives in us* that we participate in this love. There is nothing more we can add that will win God’s favor. So stop paddling. Why try to row yourself to God when you can ride the tidal wave of love who is now living inside of you. Or as Fr. Francis says ‘Why hold a candle when we are standing in the Sunlight?’

An example of my experiencing this exchange at the Cross usually goes something like this: I have a conflict with a sister in Christ. I bring it to the cross in prayer. “Lord why is she so irritating or

obstinate...” Then the Spirit prompts me to look at my own sin and to acknowledge the unloving ways I had acted or responded. I pray this scripture from Gal 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live, I live for him.” I picture myself dying with him, being buried with him and rising with him. I have laid aside my ‘rightness’ (the candle) in exchange for his righteousness (the sunlight). At the cross is where the exchange takes place. I exchange my paddle and rubber boat for the perfect love of God in Christ. I can love my sister, forgive her and ask forgiveness if needed. We can move forward and work things out for his glory, not for my wounded pride. Sometimes it is our plans or our failures that we bring to the cross. In each case we exchange them for something much greater-Christ in us!

Part Two: What would Jesus Pray?

“Christ Jesus...who is at the right hand of the Father ...intercedes for us”. (Rm. 8:34)

Not only is Jesus living inside of us he is interceding for us. (Rm:8:34.) So after his long labor for us he is with the Father praying for us! (After my labor all I wanted was a sandwich and the remote). Also living within us, in our spirits is the Holy Spirit! The two dozen or so times the Spirit is mentioned in Romans 8 after not being mentioned at all in Romans 7 is meant to hit us like a strong blast of fresh air. And what is the Spirit doing. He’s groaning. He is groaning out prayers. He is praying within us when we don’t know what to pray. He is teaching us to pray. So we have two missionaries living inside of us. They are praying in us, with us and for us. They are occupied with Prayer. Any suggestions what we should be occupied with?

Prayer is not the occasional request or gratitude or even the time slot that we set aside. Now that the Spirit has begun the work of Resurrection in us prayer is our work that we must persevere in until our bodies are raised up as well. Saint Francis rebuilt the church until it was done. Saint Therese prayed for the hardened criminal until he experienced conversion. We must continue to pray until the work is done. The work of Resurrection/Transformation for ourselves and for others.

The disciples wondered what Jesus prayed about for hours. Maybe if they prayed like he did they could understand him more and be more like him.”Teach us to pray”, they asked. Jesus answered, “When you pray say this, Father ...” (Luke 11:2). He said, “I have given them your name” (John 17:6). What name? Father! Christ’s mission in us is to show us the Father. The mission of the Holy Spirit is to lead us in this prayer. Not in just the recitation of a few dozen words but in the entering into the mystery of God’s Fatherhood and my Sonship as I pray. The work of prayer is to bring my will, my heart, my hopes and dreams in line with these words of Jesus.

Again, the gift of the Holy Spirit is to teach us to pray, to help us to pray to show us to pray to get us to pray! Prayer characterizes a Spirit filled Christian more than anything else. We, each of us must have a prayer life. Especially as we claim the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as our foundational character. Now that we are temples of the Holy Spirit our life’s work is to pray! To pray and read the scriptures. To prayerfully read the scriptures. Not just prayer or bible reading but both. Some of us have started off well but have drifted away from prayer or just squeeze it in here or there. Each one of us must be honest. I have had 30-60 minute prayer and scripture time for years now but if I am honest I am very often phoning it in. Others of us are just committing or recommitting to 10 or 15 minutes of prayer filled with

a sincere longing for God. Others of us are going to start tomorrow. Where ever you are on this spectrum let the Tsunami of Love carry you to the throne of God .

I recently went to a Carmelite monastery. Our call is similar to theirs – having Times of Prayer and then Prayer Throughout the Day. In addition to our specific ‘prayer time’ let us move out into occupied territory by bringing prayer into our day. So how do we pray throughout the day? Trust me, it doesn’t come naturally. First ask God for the desire to pray. This is a specialty of Mary, to inspire us to pray. Try turning our hearts and minds to God for one minute on the hour 10:00 2:00, 4:00. Or Angelus and Divine mercy at noon and three. Or pray your decades of the Rosary throughout the day. Or do some fielding. When you think of God, sense his love, hear his voice, see his handiwork, and respond with an acceptance of his love and a movement of love toward him from your heart. These small and very do-able exercises will help to permeate our days with Christ. This is how the world will become permeated with Christ. Try praying right before bed. An Examination of conscience, the Magnificat night prayers, a decade or just hold a crucifix and say “Lord, give me a deeper love for you and a desire to pray in the morning.”

Part Three: What does Jesus Think?

“I am convinced” Rm. 8:38

In order to act like Jesus we must first think like him. Remember what was on Jesus’ mind in Luke 11, John 14 and John 17. The Father. The Father’s love for humanity. His love for the Father. His bringing us to the Father as a prince brings his bride home to his Father’s Kingdom. To think like Jesus is not an exercise in concentration but to enter into the love. That is the only way. What did St. Paul say ‘I am convinced’ that nothing can separate us from the Love of God. Not ‘I feel’ with my emotions but I ‘know the Truth’ with my mind. The battle between the indwelling Spirit and my unredeemed body and this unredeemed universe is in the mind.

...”Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Rm 8:38-39). Nothing can stand against. Think of the Black Box in an airplane crash. No plane .No survivors. Only the black box is unharmed by the crash. Similarly nothing from the outside can harm us. Nothing can separate us. Not fear, not loneliness. What do we fear? We are more than conquerors in Christ. What is happening right now? Money problems, intense relationship fractures, loneliness, Praise God for that trial because his love and goodness will be proved by it. He will lead you to his perfect plan through it. You will see his goodness through it. He brings life out of death.

Can we capture those thoughts that spring from fear or anger or pride? While suffering has no power to separate us from the Love of God our own unchecked thoughts can cause us to move away. St. Paul wants us to be firm in our minds of God’s love for us so that nothing the world throws at us will cause us to doubt it.

We can often assume that our thoughts are the truth but they can also be hugely distorted. Just remember as Francis says, we must be in pretty bad shape if the Son of God had to give up his life, the most powerful, the most pure life, to rescue us. So let us roll up our sleeves and dig into this especially if you have felt stuck in the same place in your Christian life.

“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rm 12:2). This is not the sincerity of your intentions or the intensity of your feelings. How does this transformation happen? “Take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). So we are to **C**apture every thought, **E**xamine it and make it **O**bedient to Christ. In other words we must be the **CEO** or Chief Executive Officer of our minds. Just because we think something doesn’t make it true.

- a. Capture the thought that a person has been rude to you or that you are a flop. Sometimes these thoughts are just below the surface; we don’t even notice them but they are slowly poisoning us to death. Sometimes the thought is in your face (How dare you speak to Me like that). Often there is an emotion that is dragging you down and you need to get to the root of it. Stop, take a moment and shed light on it.
- b. Isolate it and Examine it (kind of like a melon or an avocado). Bring it into the light. Hold it up to the Word of God. Is this the truth in Christ? If not bring that thought in line with the truth.
- c. Make it Obedient to Christ. Perhaps she was not rude, just distracted, or upset. (Or maybe she didn’t return my call because she accidentally deleted it before hearing it). Let us give each person the benefit of the doubt. Or why do I get so angry when I think I am disrespected? Do I get half as ruffled when Christ is disregarded. Why am I feeling anxious? Stop and examine. I gossiped and I think the person might find out. Or, He is not my enemy, he is my spouse who has laid down his life for me and I can trust him even if I don’t understand this action.

The Scriptures are the key to this battle for the mind. Very often when I am reading scripture the thoughts of Jesus expose my own distorted truth. Often when I am not expecting it or looking for it (I can be very comfortable and upbeat in my untransformed mind). Example: I had been lying awake thinking about how I was going to slight a relative without appearing petty. Pretty twisted. Then the next morning I was reading the Psalms and came across this: Psalm 36:4 “Even on his bed he plots wickedness”. I laughed out loud! Caught in the act by the Holy Spirit! I was able to CEO my thoughts with gratitude and joy because I was being set free, being transformed, and then see my relative in a new light and treat him with love and humility.

To sum up-we can only stand before the Father because Jesus has carried us there on a wave of perfect love. The Son and the Spirit are living within us praying for us and longing to teach us the family business-Prayer. The world will be transformed as each of us becomes convinced, one thought at a time, of the truth that is in Christ Jesus and then acts on those thoughts.

Questions:

1. Often we quiet our consciences by comparing ourselves to others around us. That can be a pretty low bar. Who are we meant to compare ourselves with? Why does God set the bar so high?
2. How is prayer the work of God in us *and* our work? How will you attend to prayer and scripture this week? What might you do differently?
3. Explain how our indifference can do what no creature or power in the universe can do- rob us of our inheritance.
4. What does it mean to be the CEO of your mind? Give an example from your life of doing this.