

Homily 13th Sunday (6-28-29)

Have you ever noticed all the contradictions we find in Scripture? There are statements that seem to make no sense because of inconsistencies and conflicts within the same sacred sentence. Here are a few of the most common contradictions we know of in Scripture:

the last shall be first

a virgin will conceive a son

the Son of Man came to serve, not to be served

take the lowest seat at a banquet, if you want to have the highest seat

today in the first reading we heard: if you are an old woman with an old husband, you will have a child

the letter to the Romans also has a contradiction: you have to die in order to live and today in the gospel we heard: whoever finds his life will lose it.

Our first reading today tells of an old woman who offers great hospitality to a prophet. She initially offered him a meal but later provided a room to him that he could use whenever he wanted. In return for her hospitality Elisha found a way to intervene with God for her. This prophet promised a son to the elderly couple. This was a contradiction of simple biology.

St. Paul's letter to the Romans is a little more difficult. He speaks of dying in order to live. The contradiction here is all about faith. Through baptism and the belief in eternal life that comes through this sacrament, St. Paul is stressing our path to salvation and eternal life. This letter is telling us that we are sharing in the sacrifice of Christ but we are also sharing in His victory.

The gospel goes in a different direction. Matthew presents the contradiction that you must lose your life to find life. And this gospel talks of loving God...more than family. To best interpret this passage, Scripture scholars suggest we look at the apostles as being Jesus's specific audience. This section of Matthew's gospel along with last week's is referred to as the Mission Discourse of Christ. Jesus is directing the apostles to proclaim the Word of God as missionaries throughout the world.

Last week Jesus said have no fear as you teach...this week he said leave everything behind and go into the world for me.

This gospel also has a lesson for us. The gospel speaks of receiving a reward when we receive the knowledge given to us by the prophet or church leader. There is knowledge provided through our faith.

The Mission Discourse is teaching us to build a relationship with God and neighbor.

The news of today puts great challenges on all of us. There is a contradiction presented to us because of the Covid 19 virus. How can we build our relationship with our neighbors, when we are encouraged to isolate or maintain distance? How are we to build a greater relationship with God, when we are encouraged to stay away from crowds at church?

As part of a response I will talk about the second class I had in my formation as a deacon. A Jesuit priest, Father Michael Cooper, was our instructor in the class called Spirituality. Jesuit spirituality is very intense and joining the Jesuits requires study and spiritual development for 12 years. Commonly, priestly formation takes 6, 7 or eight years. Father Michael used the common Jesuit phrase: Finding God in All Things. This catch phrase simplified the complex subject of spirituality.

Finding God in All Things implies we are making the effort to deepen our faith. We read Scripture or watch religious broadcasts. Finding God in All Things means we enjoy the flowers that bloom in the spring and summer. It means we thank God for the rain that makes our crops grow. It means we support charities. It means we are present for one another in times of difficulty and sorrow.

Finding God in All Things during the Covid 19 virus may be more difficult. That means we may have to work harder to find God in the environment or in our neighbor. Father Michael would suggest that we should be working harder to find God, especially during the difficult times.

As one author recently wrote, these times are pressure packed...constraining...isolating...sad...frustrating...anger inducing...confusing...dangerous...and exhausting.

We should work to contradict this attitude.

Since today's readings are about contradictions perhaps, we should make greater efforts to find God in all things. We can strengthen our personal spirituality by replacing words such as constraining and frustrating and dangerous with a more optimistic set of descriptors.

Let's strive to define our faith with words such as: Gregarious... Enlightened... Just... Diverse... Resilient... Eclectic... Warm... Optimistic... Welcoming... and United.

I conclude by hoping: you find God in all things this week.

Deacon Paul J. Kudrav