

Homily Easter Three 4/21/24

First Lesson: 2 Samuel 12:15-23 (King James Version)

¹⁵ And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

¹⁶ David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.

¹⁷ And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

¹⁸ And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?

¹⁹ But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore, David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.

²⁰ Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.

²¹ Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread.

²² And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

²³ But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

Second Lesson: John 14:1-14 (King James Version)

¹⁴ Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

² In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

⁴ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

⁵ Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

⁶ Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

⁷ If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

⁸ Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

⁹ Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?

¹⁰ Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.

¹² Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

¹³ And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

¹⁴ If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Homily

Introduction

Viktor Frankl was an accomplished Austrian psychologist and medical practitioner who specialized in depression, suicide, and working with youth. When Nazi Germany annexed Austria in 1938, his Jewish heritage forced him to close his private practice and he subsequently became chief of neurology at Vienna's Rothschild Hospital, which served the Jewish population. In 1942 antisemitic rhetoric and policy were gaining momentum and as a result, Frankl and his family were transported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where his father died of starvation and pneumonia. They were then moved to Auschwitz where his mother and brother were murdered in the gas chambers. Later, at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp his wife Tilly perished from typhus. For three years, in four different camps, Frankl witnessed the degradation, horror, brutality and suffering of the people firsthand. It is hard for us to imagine in our comfortable world what being torn from your life and thrust into this type of environment would be like. Death, starvation, and terrible suffering were everywhere, and evil stood strong. Despite the odds against him, Frankl survived the ordeal and was liberated from his captors. He emerged not only a Holocaust survivor but also as a beacon of resilience and wisdom. His harrowing experiences in the concentration camps forged a profound understanding of the human spirit's capacity to endure and transcend even the darkest of circumstances.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl gives us some amazing insight gleaned from his experiences. One of the most inspiring, and paradoxical, thoughts is that God can be found even in a concentration camp, even among evil and horrific suffering. It was Frankl's belief that God is present at any time and any place when sought by individuals or by communities that worship.

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20)

Frankl lived through one of the darkest periods in human history, yet he found a way to find personal meaning in life. During his time in the concentration camps, he focused on his goal of returning home and to his work, his love for his wife, and keeping the other prisoners from despair and suicide. He focused on giving them hope. He believed that life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable, horrific and self-defeating ones. Frankl states in his book, “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Frankl was a firm believer that we cannot control everything that happens to us, but we can control how we respond to it. It was during his horrific time in a concentration camp that he did just that. Frankl taught us something incredibly powerful through his experiences. He again states, “In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.” Recognizing our suffering is crucial; it is a testament to our humanity. Yet, according to Frankl, we must go further and seek meaning within it. When we embark on this quest for meaning, we fill our suffering with purpose, turning anguish into resilience against adversity.

My favorite thing that Frankl says is this. “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.” Let me say that again. “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.” In other words, as long as we have hope and something to live for, we can bear almost anything. In our journey through life, we encounter moments of grief, pain, and loss, alongside the joys and love that enrich our existence. As we age, these hardships may become more prevalent, demanding a deeper understanding and acceptance. We endure heartaches, confront our mortality, and witness life’s struggles and our perception of how things ought to be. In these moments of despair, it is easy to succumb to the darkness, to feel overwhelmed by the weight of our burdens. Fortunately, as our readings from scripture for today remind us, we have hope. Hope in our redemption through Jesus Christ.

Body

John 14 verse 1 (Jesus reassures his disciples. This reassurance is meant to strengthen their faith during challenging times.)

In our reading today from the Gospel of John, we hear the encouraging and reassuring words of Jesus meant to strengthen our faith, especially during hard or challenging times.

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

Do not be troubled. I am quite sure that all of us here this morning, and just about everyone you know, are dealing with something that is troubling them. Anxiety about a new experience, worry about being sick or a loved one who is suffering, or dealing with pain or loss. In fact, struggling to cope with just about any experience can be troubling. Even watching the news and seeing the unrest and evil spawning from a broken world can be troubling. In these circumstances having

someone tell us to not worry or that “everything will turn out ok” often is not that comforting. However, it becomes more significant and meaningful when we understand the true nature of what Jesus was telling his disciples. Life can be overwhelming or uncertain and sometimes it is hard to know where to find hope, or reassurance.

John 14 verse 2- 6 (Jesus tells his disciples that they will have a place in Heaven, with Jesus, and that: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Jesus is the exclusive path to God.

This is where our faith, our hope and trust in God comes into play. Being told not to worry, not to be troubled, or that things will be ok can be hard to accept unless it comes from someone we can really trust, or we know we can count on. It must come from someone we know loves us and will be present with us during all of the troubles of life. When asked by his disciples Jesus has one answer, “Trust in God. Trust also in me.” Jesus tells Thomas that He is the exclusive path to God. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” In this passage we can be sure that Jesus is with us, will guide us, and is the only way to salvation.

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to suffering, to isolation and to trouble. In his Epistle to the Romans he states, “Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:37-39)

No matter what happens to us, God is with us.

John 14 verse 7-15 (Jesus tells his disciples that knowing Him is the equivalent to knowing God, the Father. Jesus also tells them that those who believe will do wonderful things, demonstrating the transformative power of faith. When we ask of the Father, in the name of Jesus, we are glorifying the Father through the Son. Jesus is the bridge between God the Father and God the Son.

In the final part of our reading today, Jesus establishes that knowing God the Father is the equivalent to knowing Him, their relationship is inseparable. In this scripture, Jesus promises that those who believe in Him will do even greater works than He did. This highlights the transforming power of faith and belief that all things are possible through Christ. Paul, again in Romans, tells us “What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31) Jesus tells that through Him, when we pray in His name, He shall hear our call. This passage encapsulates Jesus’ role as the bridge between humanity and God, emphasizing the importance of faith, unity, and the transformative impact of belief.

Action

All of us will face trouble in our lives. All of us will suffer at one point in our life. All of us will feel alone, confused and struggle to make sense of what is happening to us. David, in our first lesson, knew that despite the death of his child, God was still present, and he remained faithful and obedient. Jesus tells us in our second lesson, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Together, these two lessons paint the undeniable truth that

Jesus will be there for us, and it is our belief in what lies ahead that will help us with any trouble we find.

Viktor Frankl told us that “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how’.” We know what the why is.

“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

When we believe this, we understand that Jesus is the “way, the truth, and the life” and we will begin to have hope for tomorrow. We will understand the why in all things. The meaning of life is that God created us in His image, and he equipped us with heavenly gifts to glorify Him. As we go through life we will see that suffering, grief and loss, and tough times are present but so are many wonderful and amazing things. Paul tells us that in tribulation we find patience, in patience we find experience, and in experience we find hope. (Rom. 5:3-5). It is that hope in God, and our faith in the truth we know, that we can navigate the How in life.

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

It can be hard to endure, but we do not have to do it alone. We can pray, we can help each other, we can stay in faith, and we can be sure of what lies ahead. Often in my life, it has been through the tough times that made me lean on and trust God more than ever before. I am reminded, through demanding times, that nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. No matter what is happening, no matter what we are going through, Jesus tells us, “Trust in God. Trust also in me.”

To the only wise God our Savior, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and forever, Amen.