

MARCH FOR LIFE: Homily at St. Joseph's Cathedral, Edmonton

Thursday of the 3rd Week of Easter - May 08, 2014

Scriptures: Acts 8: 26-40; Psalm 66; John 6: 44-51

Acts 8:26-40 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁷ ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

John 6: 44-51 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶ Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." ("Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." Jn 6:27)

March for Life, Homily

Introduction:

1) A good time to celebrate LIFE: the Easter Season!!
The Easter time inserts itself into our lives as a new springtime after a long, dark, and what was for many an even arduous winter time. The 'dark season' can also be a metaphor for the challenge to find hope and joy in our current time and place Pope Francis has characterized such a time in *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* as follows:

"The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience." #2

The Pope cautions about responding with only part of the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ: "There are Christians whose lives seem like lent without Easter.Joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved!!" (#6)

Pope Francis relates the blessing of the EASTER TIME and the Good News of Life – especially Human Life!!

"Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of the resurrections suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force!" (#276)

Let us call to mind the Inspiration of the Easter Candle: The Light Always cuts through the greatest Darkness

- The light the cut through the vast darkness of Black Lake, SK, where I celebrated my first Easter Vigil in the Diocese of Mackenzie in 2014.

New Bishop from the big City, now learning about the far north of Canada, especially its peoples.

Features I am learning early on among the Dene & Inuit peoples of the North in terms of the attitude to Human life and existence:

- 1) Life – all Life, given by God the CREATOR of all things - is a gift, to be embraced, cherished, and honored.
- 2) Human life is a special gift to be cherished. It is often cherished in the gratitude for children and family.
- 3) Current Features of the northern communities of NWT, Nunuvut, and northern SASK:
 - i) **Baby boom in the North.** Many children, youth, and young adults in the communities.
 - ii) **Cherishing of elders:** provide the memory and wisdom of the aboriginal human community; also provide the sense of maturity and link to the past in order to find the wisdom about the best way to move forward in the present.
 - iii) **Cherishing of children:** are God's blessing of new life, joy, and hope for the communities. Young people are loved and encouraged to discover how God has blest them, so that their God-given blessings may be shared generously to bless their human communities, and the world they live in.
 - iv) **Cherishing of family:** families are at the heart of the communities of the north. Because they are small, everyone knows everyone's family... in fact, most are somehow related, although perhaps several generations removed.
 - Families are the place of sharing blessings: for example: the plenty of the hunt *is always shared*. In fact, if it is not shared, then there is a failure to honour the

community – and a failure of the human person in being ‘fully human’ – a failure of self, to others, to God.

- Families are the place to care for those in greatest need: Children, the elderly, the infirm, those in crisis.
- Family is not an option, but an essential and revered feature of a person’s world-view. *One does not consider one’s life, actions, and of course, future – outside the consideration of family and the community of families!!*

Development:

In today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we recall the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, who is from an area quite distinct and removed from Jerusalem – he is probably from the territories south of Egypt, with a skin color and appearance that sets him apart from the people around Jerusalem. The Eunuch will illustrate that God’s promise is available to all peoples, no matter how far away and removed they seem to be. The eunuch’s openness and increasing trust in the apostles’ direction towards becoming a member of God’s family illustrates & exemplifies the attitude the attitude that one would have to the Good News of Jesus Christ for the world.

In the Gospel we revisit in this Easter season the meaning in John 6 on how the Lord Jesus is sent by the Father, to draw God’s people to His eternal love. To see Jesus is to see the Father. Jesus is the Bread of Life come down from Heaven, who gives His flesh as life for the world. This difficult but wondrous Eucharistic teaching reminds us of several key features of our human experience and how our search for God involves our great quest not only for existence, but meaning and abundant life.

- a) We all come to the world hungry. Throughout our lives, indeed every day – we hunger, we thirst. However, we soon discover that our great problem, our task, is not to eliminate our hunger and thirst – but is to go to that which is truly food, that which will truly satisfy and be good for us. As the 4th Beattitude indicates, being hungry or thirsty is not the problem – but hungering for that which will truly satisfy and fulfill – for **RIGHTEOUSNESS** – *that which is of God* – **this is what will fill us, satisfy us!!!**
 - That which is of God features His salvific love and delight in the human community He draws to His Sacred Heart!
- b) Who would have thought the Saviour who comes to fulfill and save the longings of our lives would also become that very source, the food, that will nourish, satisfy, and fulfill the legitimate hunger and thirst that every man, woman, and child experiences throughout the world. God’s desire for His people is so great, He so wants to be intimate with us – drawing us more deeply into His sacred Heart – that the One who blesses us with nourishment **is the nourishment: the living bread that comes down from heaven ... the bread, the flesh given... that will bring full life, forever.**

- This vision and proclamation – at first glance – is just too much to fathom. It may seem utterly fanciful, and absurd. And yet... the revelation of God is that He, in His Son, gives that much of Himself for us – through the Life, Passion, Death, and then Rising of His Son (that we now celebrate in this Easter time).

This vision IS OUR FAITH!! It is the heart of the Christian proclamation, which is now at its liturgical zenith in this Easter season that we now celebrate.

c) People – saints we know of, and many others throughout history we do not know of - have had their perspective utterly renewed and their joy and hope more than restored by the Good News of the Easter proclamation of Christ Risen and Alive!!

For example, today we celebrate the optional memorial of Blessed Catherine of St. Augustine. Blessed Catherine is one of many examples of God’s beloved who burned with an ardent desire to accomplish the Will of God to bless and save the world in all things. At only the age of 10 she did something quite bizarre – she signed in blood her total consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She later entered the convent of a branch of the Augustinians – the Hospitallers of Bayeus, and later went to Quebec City to help her Sisters in the Hotel-Dieu hospital, In subsequent years, her deep love of the Lord and all human souls precious to His Sacred Heart, led her in a life of deep service and work with those persons struggling with famine, sickness and illness. This she did until her death at the age of only 36 years.

As we reflect on such an amazing human soul and life, we cannot but ask ourselves, why would Catherine do this?? Was she just quite exceptional? Was she maybe a bit simple, or not in her right mind? Maybe she just lived in a world too far removed from our reality to really know what she was dealing with.

There is, however, an obvious answer, given what we know about her life. She was clearly in love with Jesus Christ. She was convinced that His way of love and service to others was not only a choice for a meaningful life among other choices. We also observe that she knew The Lord! It seems she could not help but love and serve so, as she was only expressing a deep love and joy that was the result of embracing and walking with the Ultimate Lover of the world!!

Next Sunday is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

Vocation: “A call by God to all His beloved people, to respond with one’s whole life, to love and serve Christ and the People of God”.

- A vocation is not just a function, role, or job – A way of life that brings meaning and fulfillment.
- In fact, to not discover and live our vocation, is to be perpetually frustrated, because we have not found, nor are we living the one way and life that is

unique to us, by which we discover the mystery of God's love and presence in the world.

As we prepare for the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations**, as we celebrate a unique feature of the Dignity of Human Persons, we reflect on *humanity's greatest calling*:
... to dedicate our lives to God, and in Him as the ultimate and greatest Lover of all – to make a significant difference with our lives, and help humanity be a true human community. I have spent much of my priesthood working with young people through youth ministry and in Catholic education. I have found what many others observe: increasingly, young people are not just looking for a job that will provide good income and security, but are looking for a way of life, that will make a meaningful difference in the world. This desire continues throughout life.

- this desire to go deeper than task or job is placed in His people, who are called and able to uniquely share in the life and mission of the Son. God calls us to work with Him, in His Son, Jesus Christ, make the world a better place... one that is redeemed by the Gospel!

Conclusion

On this day, when we celebrate and “March for Life,” we stand in solidarity with every man, woman, and child who lives, has lived, and will ever live ... because Life – Human Life ... is such a privilege, and such a gift. It is also that for which the Saviour God, Jesus Christ, has died. *God has done such as this for us, for Humanity.* God has literally given *His all* for Humanity!!! Indeed, God boldly went where no one else could go... *for our sake!*

May we never let our partial vision of such a reality and gift limit the respect, the honour, and the delight we would consistently have for all of human life- especially when we may be tempted to think that hardship, or tragedy ...mitigates in any way the significance of even one single human life.

There is much to stand for, to march for, to celebrate this day – and always!!