

## Sermon Proper 7 Year C June 22. 2010

One of the core things I learned in Roman Catholic Seminary was invaluable to me in mustering the courage to leave Catholic Seminary back in 1979. What I learned was a teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas having to do with conscience. I learned that above all things one must act in accord with one's conscience. Aquinas is quick to say that acting in accord with one's own conscience is not just acting willy-nilly about how one feels in the moment, but is a response to a well-formed conscience that is a result of study, input, prayer and reflection...a lifetime of discernment of what is right and what is wrong and acting in accord with that discernment. Aquinas would go so far as to say even if our conscience is in opposition to the teachings of the church we are bound to follow it. To not do so, is to act with disregard for how God's spirit may be working and speaking within you and within me.

In his papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, pope John Paul II wrote, "[A]cting in conscience is acting authentically. It is acting in accord with your own encounter with self." In current Catholic teaching, "Man has the right to act according to his conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters".

In secular writings commonly used metaphors for conscience include the "voice within" and the "inner light".

There is a message for us about conscience in our reading today from 1 Kings. Elijah, having won the contest among the prophets has just slaughtered the prophets of Baal that were under the protection of Queen Jezebel and has fled into the wilderness because his life is now in danger. He goes to stand on the mountain because the Lord is about to pass by. A great wind passes by but God is not in the wind, there is an earthquake, but God is not in the earthquake, there is a fire, but God is not in the fire; and after the fire there is sheer silence. Elijah wraps himself in a mantle and stands at the entrance to a cave, because God has passed him by....passed him by in the sheer silence.

The translation in the King James' version is *the still small voice*, but I think the translation in the New Revised Standard is even more powerful...sheer silence. God passes in the voice within, speaks in the sheer silence of the heart. God speaks to that deepest part of our being, our conscience, where we lie exposed to ourselves as we are...the place we come face to face with the truth of ourselves, of our lives and God.

I mentioned that following my conscience allowed me to leave Roman Catholic seminary. What was my conscience telling me? I was very young, only 21 years old, and I knew something was happening to me, but I was not ready or able to see it clearly. I knew I was changing and remained restless about this vocation

of celebrate priesthood. All that I knew was that I had to leave to discover who I really was and felt that Catholic seminary was not the place I was going to learn it. At the time I was working on a Master's degree in philosophy and I was using the summer to get a jump on my thesis which had something to do with Hobbes. I was sitting on the grass in front of the library on the campus of Catholic University in Washington, DC. It was a beautiful day. I simply looked up at the crystal blue sky and realized I had to leave. Right there and then I gathered up all my books walked into the library and returned them. Later that evening I was having dinner with my spiritual director. I walked into his room and he said without my saying a word, "you're not coming back this fall are you?" I told him no I'm not. He said, GOOD, and promptly made us a couple of martinis to celebrate. Needless to say he remains one of my dear friends to this day.

Part of the human condition is that we are self-transcendent. We yearn for those things that seems just beyond our reach. In contemporary consumer culture this means that we think if I just made more money, if I just had a new car or house....etc....then my life would be complete. But you and I know that none of that never happens does it. Once we get those things that we think make us happy, we are on to the next desire That's just part of the human condition. We always long for something beyond us. In theological terms the psalmist today in Psalm 42 puts it beautifully this way....*As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul is athirst for God, athirst for the living God.* Our fundamental yearning is for God, the ultimate reality that is just beyond our reach or control. The great 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian St. Augustine of Hippo writes, "our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, O Lord."

In those confusing days in 1979 when I left seminary, my soul was yearning for something that I thought I'd find in Roman Catholic priesthood, but it wasn't there. I needed a 25 year break before I discovered that the call was priesthood, just not in the Roman Catholic church. I remained restless all those years and will continue to be restless until I rest in God. I just give thanks that I was able to hear God in the sheer silence of my heart although it took a while.

In Paul's letter this morning from Galatians, he again underscores the theme that we are justified by faith and not by the law. It isn't what we do or don't do that guarantees us eternal life and salvation. Rather, in Christ Jesus you and I are all children of God through faith. It is Christ's action that gives us access to God. The promise that our restless hearts will be satisfied is fulfilled because we belong to Christ and are therefore Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to the promise.

What good news for us today. A message that God speaks directly to us in the silence of our hearts, molding and shaping our conscience that we might act in accord with the way God would have us be; that we have this endless yearning for God built into the fabric of our human nature and that this restlessness will

someday be satisfied because we belong to Christ and are therefore children of God.

The invitation then for all of us this morning is to recognize that we are restless creatures until we rest in God and that's OK. Human beings are hardwired for God and we'll never be satisfied until we come face to face with God. The psalmists understood this.

So in the meantime, our job is to seek God not in the great and grand things but in the sheer silence that reveals the truth to us....the spirit speaking to our innermost selves and forming our conscience. May all of us have the courage to follow our consciences...the prompting of the spirit in our hearts until the day that we find our rest in God.

Let us praise those fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice. Let us praise those fathers who, lacking a good model for a father, have worked to become a good father.

Let us praise those fathers who by their own account were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support. Let us pray for those fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.

Let us praise those fathers who, despite divorce, have remained in their children's lives. Let us praise those fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.

Let us praise those fathers who, as stepfathers, freely choose the obligation of fatherhood and earned their step children's love and respect. Let us praise those fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold the child in their heart.

Let us praise those men who have no children, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.

Let us praise those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors

and guides.

Let us praise those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.

And let us praise those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and whose love continues to nurture us.