

Quinquagesima Sunday (19 February 2023)

“When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

+In the Name...

It's hard to grow up, isn't it? I don't mean your mom and dad telling you what to do: eating your brussels sprouts or emptying the cat box when you did not want to, I just mean the everyday, learning how to function. Just when you think you had it figured out, didn't some adult: a teacher, a parent, a boss maybe even a clergyman, added to what they expected of you because you were getting older, and you were ready for more

“responsibility”! And therein lies one of the great ironies of being a child: we spend our whole childhood wanting to get older, and then when it happens, we realize the error of our ways: “Gosh, I thought adults got to do whatever they wanted when they wanted!” But then it is too late. Not that we could have done anything to delay the process anyway.

Perhaps this is not a good example because as a young person in church, I never remember wishing I were older for specifically church-y reasons. Yet there still is this sense among many in the Church that once one has hit a certain point in one’s life in the Church, there is really no more to do, no more to learn. As long as we show up to Sunday services, say our prayers, and do not rock the boat, we are living out the Gospel. “Afterall, I have been confirmed and know that Jesus is the Son

of God, what more do I need to do? And St. Mark's uses the right prayer book and is on the right side of the women's ordination issue, what more can there be?"

A lot more, as it turns out. Lent throws an unwelcome monkey wrench into the ambivalence and happiness of our hypothetical Christian's philosophy of life. While our life as Christians officially did not begin until baptism, it never officially ends. We are currently members of the Church militant, that is, the Church on earth who do battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. At death we graduate, if you will, into the Church Expectant. There the cleansing process is finished, making us fit for the Kingdom of Heaven. Finally, there is the Church Triumphant. This is where we join our God in Heaven.

But it is the first group, the Church Militant, with whom we are interested in for the purposes of this sermon. We cannot enter into Heaven until we are made perfect. And while you may consider that something of a fool's errand, it is a lifelong process, for which the Church, in Her wisdom, gave us Lent.

It is appropriate that we just celebrated St. Valentine's Day earlier this week, as Lent is really about love! "How do you figure?" you might ask? We think of Lent as giving up things, maybe as some sort of "misery loves company" idea. But God created mankind in His love. Then he gave us freewill, so we can choose not to love Him. We can exercise our "adult wisdom" and reject him. Gone is that puerile follow-without-thinking mentality! Not exactly... God has given mankind chance after chance to change our ways and follow him. This is

where we give up our childish ways and take the opportunity to give the Creator of all the Universe His due!

It all started “a long time ago, in a garden far, far away...” For the first time mankind chose himself over God. “No, God, you do not know what is best for me; I know better!” But after that apple episode in the Garden we got our act together, right? Well, not exactly. One son of the first man was so wicked that he killed his brother. After that, gradually Mankind was so wicked that God destroyed the world with a flood. Then there was a tower that we built because we thought ourselves so important that we needed to build a way to Heaven. Eventually God chose a race of people, the Jews, who trace their lineage from Abraham. From this group, God raised up prophets through whom He spoke to His people. Of course, God created and loves

all humans, but He dealt most closely with this group. The Ten Commandments being given to Moses on Mt. Sinai is an excellent example. From this race came the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, whose coming was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. He too would be rejected by His people, just as the many covenants were that had been made between God and His people before. But not before He reformed His Church; He took the Jewish Church, if you will, with its Temple and synagogues, and added to it. He attended and worshipped as a devout Jew during His life. "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil," Jesus tells us in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Later in the same book He will call the Church "Israel", the same name used for His chosen people. The revelation of the Old Testament is completed in that of the New Testament. So there is but one

Church, the Christian Church, if you will, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. She was founded by Christ on the apostles.

“Catholic” does not mean we are under the Bishop of Rome, but, to quote St. Vincent of Lerins, “we hold that which hath been believed everywhere, always, and of all men”: to quote a now-passed Anglican bishop, the opposite of Catholic is not

Protestant but heretic. The Church exists but for one purpose: to save souls, that is, to get them into Heaven. Now that statement would prove controversial with some of my fellow clergymen in this city. A colleague of mine recently went to a funeral at a well-known congregation in this city. There were beautiful stained-glass windows of our Lord, but never once was He mentioned in the service. We still have a lot of growing up to do! I am not saying we should not feed the hungry, clothe the

naked, or care for widows and orphans. But those are a secondary purpose of Holy Mother Church. Such an important task could not be left to a man-made church, but only one of divine creation.

So with that in mind, we have much to do this Lent! Please prayerfully consider what you are going to do to grow in your faith. What are you going to do to mature in the Faith, bring your life closer to Our Lord and thus making yourself more fit for the Kingdom of Heaven? [See you Wednesday!]

+In the Name...