

Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C (2022)

Genesis 18:20-21, 23-32

Colossians 2:6-14

Luke 11:1-13

“I will not destroy the city, if I find in it forty righteous people, or thirty, or twenty, or ten. I will not destroy the city.”

That sentence takes us back to the First Reading of this Mass. It is the God of the Old Testament who is speaking, and he is promising to hold his anger in check. And his reason for his not destroying the city is simple. He does not want people to perish. In other words, he is refusing to destroy life; and, in that refusal, he is affirming something very important; and that is the dignity and the worth of every human person.

Every once in awhile, we may come across a little story that tells that story and reinforces that truth. This is, I think, one such account, told by the great Indian writer, Rabindranath Tagore. He died just about eighty years ago now, It goes this way.

“The morning came, the master said, but my servant did not appear. All the doors had been left open; the water had not been drawn from the well; my morning meal was not ready. Clearly my servant had been out all night, and he was not back yet.

“As the hours passed, my anger grew; and I planned harsh punishments for him. At last, he came, late in the morning. He bowed low. I called out angrily, ‘Get out. I do not want to see you ever again!’

“He just looked at me. At first, he remained silent, and then he said in a low husky voice, ‘My daughter died last night.’ The master concluded, ‘He went to his task, and I could not speak.’”

This account of what happened is brief, but the message is clear. Until now, the master has given the rules and the servant has obeyed. No questions asked. However, the authority of the master over the servant crumbles before the supremacy and worth of human life. The master falls silent. And sometimes, maybe too often, we also have to face a similar crushing moment, before we fully grasp the value and worth of those who make our lives worth living.

That awareness of how precious each person is does not mean that we will not lose patience, sometimes. It does not mean that we will not get angry, sometimes. It does not even mean that there will be no stress within a family or tension within a home, from time to time. But that awareness of how precious life is should also mean that we never descend to – or remain in – that deep bitterness which can tragically afflict a home and can destroy the peace within it.

That dignity is ours for one reason; and, that is, that there is within each one of us something of God. That something is sacred; and, for that reason, we are sacred, all of us. We can see that truth so easily in the little baby, or a child. We can see it in a partner whom we love, and we can see it in our own son or daughter, regardless of age.

But this same truth challenges us to go even further, and to see that same dignity, that something of God, in everyone, even in those whom we may not like very much. It means that another, every other person, deserves my politeness and my kindness. It also means that I have missed the message of this Reading every

time that I think myself better than another or put another down. And we must remember that we may never know in this life the effect on another of a compliment extended, a kindness shown or encouragement given.

And perhaps there is one more thing that I have to remember, and it is this. I must let others know now of my respect and love for them and of their value in my life. For we all know that things can change so quickly in life, so very, very quickly. We never know, we never know!

Those are, I think, the truths which the God of Abraham would teach us, when he says ...

“I will not destroy the city, if I find in it forty righteous people, or thirty, or twenty, or ten. I will not destroy the city.”