

Father Bergida's Homily

October 15, 2023 at 1 pm Mass

Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Edited for greater clarity and accuracy by Fr. Bergida on October 19, 2023

During this month of the Rosary, please join me at the beginning of this homily with a Hail Mary.

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art
thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb,
Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

The beginning of the 20th century saw a lot of advancements, a lot of let's say optimism and hope. People saw the material achievements of science and technology leading to a better life. Then came the two World Wars and with them perhaps a more realistic view: technology and material advancement could lead to good, but if not properly guided could lead to evil on a grander scale. In 1963, Pope Saint John XXIII published what John Paul II would call an "epic encyclical," his letter *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth). In that encyclical, Pope Saint John the XXIII said, "Peace on earth, which all men of every era have most eagerly yearned for, can be firmly established and sustained only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed." *Only if the order laid down by God be dutifully observed.* Now again, at beginning of the twenty first century, many people have a great optimism about the future with its even greater technological advances, such as AI and self-driving cars. Perhaps there is an over-optimism that simply believes that man is always advancing. Pope Saint John Paul II would speak of it in this way: unless there is a corresponding moral revolution, a moral betterment of society, we're doomed to the same things being repeated over again, our advancements actually being our undoing.

Over the last week I've heard the following: *I can't understand why God is allowing this. It seems like everything is breaking down. I'm so angry, so sad. Why is God allowing the Jewish people, His people, to go through this?* I have also heard: *and the innocent people in Palestine or the West Bank or Gaza.* This is the substance of the comments. I am very well aware that many watching the news have felt a certain righteous anger. But perhaps it's led to thoughts - maybe nobody in here - about what one might like to do to those terrorists and those people who have caused these atrocious sins against innocent people. Yes, our hearts ought to break at what is happening not only in Israel but what has happened and will continue to happen in Gaza.

It is very hard to connect what is going on with the readings. I am going to make an attempt – if you don't think I succeed – cut me a little slack. In our first reading, we see a very joyful thing in Isaiah. It's God coming visiting his holy mountain, the mountain of Jerusalem where the temple was built. It describes a wedding feast or a great banquet of the king. It helps us actually understand the gospel today as well- but this great beautiful chapter 25 of Isaiah is placed within chapters 24 to 27 which are often called “The Apocalypse of Isaiah”. They speak of woe; they speak of destruction; they speak of chastisement or God's punishment due to the sins of the nations, including Israel. But they also offer a promise of hope. The gospel itself today too is apocalyptic in the sense that it “reveals” the Kingdom - the Heavenly Kingdom, the banquet where the eternal wedding Feast of the Lamb takes place. Matthew's parable of the wedding feast in turn is clarified at the end of scripture in the Book of Revelation, where we see the Wedding Feast of the Lamb - the lamb depicted here on the central panel of the altar, which is Christ.

I am not going to address the “wedding garment” – that is a very interesting section- Father De Celles gave a very beautiful homily earlier today on the garment, so please go back and watch it on the parish website. What I am going to talk about is the context of the wedding feast in relationship to last week's parable, which immediately precedes this Gospel. Last week you may remember we also heard from Isaiah and from Matthew's Gospel about a vineyard. You may

remember, in the first reading the vineyard was the people- the House of Israel. Because they are not producing the fruits God desired, He breaks down the walls that protected them, the spiritual hedge, allowing the vineyard to be destroyed because of their failure to live according to the Covenant. The Gospel takes the analogy a step further where the tenants are the leaders of the people. Jesus by implication is “the son” sent by his father, after the long line of servants, the prophets. The tenants of the vineyard throw Him outside the wall and kill Him.

Today's parable comes after the one just mentioned. St. John Chrysostom speaking about the parable that we heard this morning, says that God's compassion and patience and longsuffering with the Jewish people is so great. Even after they have put the Son to death, they are invited to the wedding Feast. We see this connection clearly in Peter's Pentecost Sermon (of course, we did not hear that today) but in Peter's Pentecost Sermon he says “Him who you put to death crucifying him, God has raised him up” - the people are struck to the heart; many of them are converted that very day. But many of them do not. So St. John Chrysostom says going back to Matthew that they make excuses: I have land that I've acquired, I have married, I need to take care of this business... I cannot come to the Wedding Feast. The Wedding Feast which also is the New Kingdom. Remember that God sent through Christ the apostles first to the people of Israel. Inviting them into the Wedding Feast. The majority refused. And so then the father says, “Go out to the highways and the byways - the gentiles - and invite everyone that they might come in.

Departing now a little bit from our gospel - we go to Paul to answer the question, “what is the role of the Jews?” This is the point I am trying to bring out here. They are the elect, the chosen ones of God, they've received the blessing – they are children of Abraham. But Paul says in his Letter to the Romans that they have failed to accept the Christ. He mourns over it in Chapter 9 of the letter, even saying that he wishes that he himself were accursed or cut off from God, if by that act the people of Israel could be saved. In other words, Paul is willing to give up his own personal

salvation, if only his brethren could be saved. (Paul is an Israelite, beyond reproach. Miraculously he is brought to faith in Christ through the flash of light and the encounter with Jesus on his way to Damascus, where he intended to persecute the Christian community there.) Paul says the chosen people have been cut off, being punished or receiving the consequences of their sins but that God's promise will eventually be fulfilled. They will be regrafted onto the vine. So, part of the tradition of the Church has been that before the second coming of Christ, there will be a mass conversion of the Jews to the faith. An acceptance of Christ as the true Messiah. There already has been a number who call themselves Messianic Jews but that number will be far greater. Why do I mention this? Because this can actually help us to understand today's events.

Any people, any nation that does not submit to the Covenant revealed by Christ has not yet entered into the Wedding Feast and the blessings of the New Covenant. Christ desires both Jew and Muslim to enter in. Both Jew and Muslim claim to have Abraham as father. The Jews through Isaac and the Muslims through Ishmael – Ishmael as you may remember was the son of the servant **not** the son of The Promise, as scripture calls it. What's going on today is very, very sad. But at one level is really the result of centuries of feuding between two related peoples, two brothers. (Islam in a certain sense is a heresy. It's a heresy because it takes elements of Judaism and elements of Christianity... changes them, adds elements of its own, and doesn't do honor to either.) We won't get into all the historical reasons for that.

What's also taking place in the Holy Land has a centuries old, rather a millennia old history. Yes, the land was promised to Abraham and his descendants thousands of years ago. The Israelites never fully possessed it, due to failure to obey God's commands. Finally, in the first and second century A.D. due to various rebellions, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, slaughtering and deporting many Jews. Nevertheless, Jews maintained contact with and a presence in the Holy Land. However, it was no longer a Jewish state. For over fifteen hundred years, control switched, sometimes back and forth, between pagan, Christian, and Islamic powers. After World War II,

the nations of Europe and the United States feeling so sorry/guilty over what had happened to the Jewish people sought to create the nation of Israel. At this point, Arabs and Jews had been living together in the Holy Land for some time. The creation of an Israeli State side-by-side that of an Arab one, in many ways set the stage for what we are seeing unfold today. This in no way justifies terrorism or heinous and evil acts against the Israelis. But the issue of land, governance, and resources have never really been settled justly and equitably.

Furthermore, there will not be peace in the Holy Land until both sides accept Jesus as king. There cannot be peace wherever Jesus is excluded because both religions and both peoples are at enmity with one another and only Christ breaks down the enmity between peoples. Christians have often played peacemakers in the Holy Land between Jews and Moslems. Christians too at times have been treated poorly by both sides, at times being pushed out, which is a very sad thing, since as Christians we are meant to be leaven in society.

How do we respond? How do we deal with all that we have seen and probably will continue to see? One thing we need to keep in mind – and this is important – we can't just ignore the situation and put our heads in the sand and pretend it's not happening. That would be a lack of charity, as well as a lack of realizing the significance of what's going on.

There are two spiritual poles of the earth. They are not Washington and Moscow, or Beijing or any other major city like those. The two spiritual poles are Rome and Jerusalem. What takes place there, often is a sign or a warning to the rest of the world. A spiritual battle is going on in Rome right now over the very nature of the Church, who and what is she? Some in influential positions within the Church are promoting an ecclesial “identity crisis”. There is also this physical (and spiritual) battle going on not far from the holy city of Jerusalem. In a biblical worldview, these are warnings to us. The spiritual ills as well as the threat of war, terrorism and other acts of violence are not so far from our own doors unless we repent as well.

What can we do? Sometimes we want and imagine how we would deal with those who are aggressors – wipe them off the face of the Earth! Leave vengeance to God. We should want the conversion of everyone even the worst of sinners. Paul, in a sense, was a terrorist before his miraculous conversion. But when that flash of light took place and God touched his mind and heart, he became the greatest evangelizer for the faith.

We have two spiritual weapons that we need to use: prayer and fasting. Our bishop, Bishop Burbidge has asked that this statement be read to you and everyone here:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has united with Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the bishops of the Holy Land in their call that *Tuesday, October 17* be a worldwide day of fasting, prayer, and abstinence for peace. I invite all of the faithful of the Diocese of Arlington to join me in participating in this sacrificial offering to God with the intention to end the violence and hatred in the midst of this crisis.

May the Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, transform hearts, bring an end to war, violence and suffering, and grant peace to the world.

Bishops, at least American Bishops, don't usually ask for this kind of level of sacrifice and fasting. So when they do, they are saying, "this is something very important". What exactly is being asked of us: first abstinence, that we abstain from meat on Tuesday as a penitential act like we would on the Fridays of Lent. But also, that we would do what we do on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, that we would have two meals that are smaller, that don't really equal one meal and then just one primary meal. You are not under penalty of sin if you do not do this. But if you are distressed by what you see, and you should be, if you think there is any concern for the world... why not do this? Why not? Because there's a spiritual element to this conflict.

The second aspect is prayer. During this month of the Rosary, we've been given the answer for peace. A little over 100 years ago, Our Lady of Fatima gave us the peace plan for the world: to pray the rosary every day. To make reparations of the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Dear friends, the world has not woken up to this. Our Lady also said that there would be wars... that Russia would spread her errors... that all these things would happen if her voice and her heeding was not attended to.

Pray the rosary everyday... pray it while in the car... while exercising... while waiting for an appointment. Pray it alone. Pray with your family. Pray it with your Parish family here at 6:30 p.m. on weekday nights. Even if you are not yet ready to commit to the full rosary, pray a decade... a decade every day. It will just take you a couple of minutes. Please commit to start carrying it on your person. After all, how hard is it to pick it up from your nightstand or your bedroom door knob or your bathroom counter and just put it in your pocket. Put it in your pocket and let your fingers handle it when you grab your car keys or you go to grab your handkerchief, or whatever you carry in your pockets. Feel it's weight and let it remind you of the weight of the world that Jesus Christ carried on the cross. If you do this, you will have already begun to pray. Parents don't let your kids leave the house without a rosary on them. Some of you don't let your kids go anywhere without a cell phone so that they can call home. Don't let them leave home without a spiritual means of calling home.

Dear friends we have the plan of peace, we are ambassadors of peace, ambassadors of Christ. We pray that through Mary, Queen of Peace, that all Nations, all Peoples, might come to Jesus, the King of Peace.