

Homily 1-11-15 (Peter shows no partiality)

Prayers can be beautiful in many ways. They can be beautiful because of language, whether poetic or prose. The poetry of a prayer can move our hearts and minds closer to God merely by the rhythm and aching longing in our souls to be closer to God. Poems can be etched into our very brains by repetition. Consider the 'Our Father'. Sometimes when I perform the rite of anointing or healing on an Alzheimer's victim, when I get to the part of the rite where the 'Our Father' is prayed the person with Alzheimer's will say the prayer automatically. It is etched into our very brains and souls and even that terrible disease cannot erase it. It is the same way with the 'Hail Mary'. How many of us here can tell stories of elderly people in our families that whenever every memory has been erased, the Hail Mary was still there.

And prayers can be beautiful because of the sentiment or thought behind the prayer. " O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who have most need of your mercy." I think this is possibly the most beautiful prayer we can pray. Certainly it is the most counterintuitive prayer that I know of. Think about what it is asking: 'lead all souls to heaven'. 'All souls', without exclusion or exception. This includes all those people we cannot envision of being admitted into heaven. But what we cannot conceive of, God certainly can.

There are no limits to God's mercy. But it is against natural human tendency to want all souls to go to heaven. We cannot forgive and we want retribution. I won't darken your hearts with specific examples, but you only have to read the daily papers to see what I'm talking about. There are people that commit such heinous crimes that we find it impossible to wish that they would escape the ultimate punishment: eternity separated from God, that is Hell. The problem with this way of thinking is that the person that hopes another soul goes to Hell is very close to Hell themselves.

Our first pope, the apostle Peter speaks to us today through the book of Acts; ' Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.'" Note how close this is to the view of 'lead all souls to heaven, especially those that have the most need of your mercy'. Who is it that is most in need of God's mercy? Wouldn't you say those that have committed terrible crimes? I would think so. This is the way we are supposed to strive to think and orient ourselves. Not smacking our lips in satisfaction at the idea of someone we hate suffering torments in the everlasting flames. Like I said, when we indulge ourselves in this twisted fantasy we are very close to Hell ourselves. And like I have said many times before, I'm preaching to myself more than anyone.

“In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.” This underscores the universality of the Catholic Church. Of course, we all know that Catholic means 'universal'. The goal is to include all of humanity in the tent of the Catholic faith. The Catholic Church holds its arms open to everyone: rich or poor, every nationality, every race, everyone.

When we are baptized we are made holy. Then why was Jesus baptized? After all, what could possibly be more holy than the Son of God Himself? But when Jesus was baptized He made the water holy, the water didn't make Him holy. He was baptized so that we could be baptized with the Holy Spirit and the waters of baptism would be holy for us. And note the universal character of what is used in baptism: water. Water that is available for everyone, everywhere. The baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season in the calendar of the church. We return to ordinary time for awhile until Lent. I think it is a good time to ponder the meaning of the word 'Catholic'. There is a website called 'Catholic hierarchy.org' It is very interesting. One thing you will notice if you explore this website is that the entire earth is divided into dioceses. In other words, no matter where you go on earth you are in a Catholic diocese. Now, it may be impossible for the Catholic Church to operate everywhere, but every square inch of the earth belongs to some diocese or

another. The Church is making a profound statement by doing this. It is underscoring the universal character of its mission. The Church, I repeat, is intended for everyone, everywhere. We must never forget this. The Church isn't an exclusive club we are born into. It is intended that everyone, everywhere should be included in Her arms. We don't call it 'Holy Mother Church' for nothing.