

LENT 2017 – day 7 - 10th March

Ezekiel 18:21

"But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die."

If a person repents and turns to God, He will not die but be blessed.

But this is an important factor we can deal with today concerning progression of revelation.

Progression of revelation is that God didn't reveal everything at once to all of us.

Why? Because we aren't mature or grown to fully comprehend what God is doing. This progression of revelation means it takes time for us to understand what God is speaking and saying. Sometimes it takes hundreds or thousands of years to understand this.

One of those facts is this truth that you are personally responsible for what you

do. Those days in the ancient world, if you did something then your whole family was responsible for it. A little earlier it wasn't just your family but your whole village was responsible. Even before that, the whole clan was responsible. That's why, if someone did something, you get these revenge killings and they knock off an entire village because of something one person has done. It was because of this thinking that everyone was responsible for what one person did. *This is ancient, primitive thinking.* Little by little, as they reflected, they began to understand that God does not think that way. God doesn't want to punish a generation for something one person did, He doesn't want to punish a whole family for what one person does. That is not the heart of God.

Ezekiel 18:22

None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live.

It is narrowed down to personal responsibility and they said that you will have to answer for who you are.

Ezekiel 18:23

Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

This reflection is not only about themselves, but this reflection is also about God.

You must understand Catholic vision and fundamentalism. Fundamentalism says everything is already told and nothing can change because everything is according to the world. The real problem in Islam is fundamentalism. When you say nothing can change and the revelation is absolute, Islam is stuck with a 6th century worldview. Muhammad lived in the 6th century and he had a worldview of the 6th century - how women are treated, how men are treated, how you punish a crime. Everything

was a 6th century worldview - you cut off a hand, you decimate a village, you destroy a people, anyone who doesn't accept Islam has to be killed - and then when you do that, you will go to heaven. That is a 6th century worldview.

Unfortunately, written into their system is this thing that you cannot change this worldview. So the conflict within Islam is that modern thinkers in the Muslim tradition are being attacked by the fundamentalists. In the 19th century, in Saudi Arabia emerged an interpreter of the Quran called Wahhab. Wahhab is the thinker behind the modern attacks - ISIS and the other groups are coming from this base of Wahhabism. Wahhabism said, "You're interpreting the scripture of the Quran all wrong. You have diluted it by allowing western thinking to get inside this. You have to find the original interpretation." The prince of Saudi Arabia gave him all the support. So when they both got together they created this worldview we are having now of going back to the 6th century worldview as the answer to all the problems of life.

But it is not only a Muslim problem - but it also a Christian problem. We have many Christians who think in the same way. They say, "The bible is the word of God and you must go back to the words according to our understanding." That's why we have people who are attacking the church, based on their interpretation of the scriptures.

But the church thinks differently. A lot of people try to find a Catholic by asking if they're saying the Hail Mary. They are checking if we are really Catholic. We went to St. Bridget's and we were introduced to the teachers - and I was introduced by saying, "He is a layman but he is also a catholic." That's also fundamentalism. To be Catholic is to carry the catholic worldview.

The Catholic worldview is progression of revelation - God is continuing to reveal His heart and mind through centuries, through time.

You find it by studying the events and the signs of the times through the light of the gospel. You become relevant to the world. You look at these events that are happening today through the light of the gospel. But it is not done only by individuals. If individuals do it, we are in big trouble because if you put a hundred people together we'll have a hundred opinions. That's why the church continues to teach. You have the teaching office of the church - not only the Bible, but it teaches about the events that are happening today.

Today if you look at it, the moral voice of the Christian world has become the Catholic pope - whether people like it or not. Why? Because of this progression of revelation. The church is duty bound to rethink positions according to what is happening in history. Vatican II is something like that. In 1965, the bishops got together and rethought how the church should present itself to the world in the 20th and 21st century. It's worthwhile for us to become aware of what they have taught. It is in Vatican II that the church redefined the mission of the people. The church said that everyone who is baptized - you and I - are called to a mission from the Lord. That's why we are allowed to preach. It is not because someone likes me more than someone else or someone doesn't like somebody. That permission was given by Vatican II.

Unfortunately we have a memory before Vatican II - because we are people who have lived before 1965. In that memory only priests had a ministry, and nuns and others assisted them. There was no layman's ministry. But the progression of revelation made the bishops reflect and say that everyone has a mission. Together we are brothers and sisters, working together to build the kingdom of God.

That's why the bishop's conference accepts us as a legitimate movement in the church - though the leadership is lay. So people who don't have a background think something is wrong with this. They ask, "Who are these people? They don't have the proper base we have." They don't understand the concept of the progression of revelation and the teaching of the church. We believe the Holy Spirit who led the church and formed the scriptures is continuing to lead it into the other centuries.

So don't worry, in the 21st century, if we have to take a turn, the Holy Spirit will lead the church to do it. In the 22nd century, it will be the same. That's why we say the church will continue until the end of time.

Fundamentalism will come when there is a need and will disappear because it cannot change and adjust. That is the war that is going on in the world today. We have a lot of Christian fundamentalism because the church didn't change in time. If you delay, it works from other places. Now, the church is learning and reworking the idea of servanthood and discipleship and we are doing something at a deeper level and it can be seen all over the world. The church is learning to be humble servants of the master - rather than bosses and kings and dukes and all kinds of power centers. We are influenced by the world as well. We lived in a European world, where kings ruled, where princesses ruled. So we also had princes of the church and princes of the world and all the princes met together and things like this kept going. But the Holy Spirit continues to give progression of revelation.

Here we have a vision of who God is. Ezekiel begins to realize God is not someone who is interested in punishing people. We need to grow in that awareness and even children have to grow in that awareness. I was talking to my grandson yesterday and I asked him to sing a song and he didn't want to sing a song, but he didn't want to tell me he can't. So he said, "My teacher won't allow me to sing in the car." I wanted to carry on the conversation and find out how he is thinking, so I asked him, "So why don't you ask the teacher and tell her you want to sing in the car?" Then he said, "She will say no." I asked, "Why don't you ask again?" Then he looked at me and said, "Then she will say, 'No means no!'" Then I said, "But if you ask again what will happen?" He said, "Then she will punish me!"

Can you see the concept of God? That's why you need to grow from the punishment syndrome into a deeper relationship. When you interact with children they actually teach you. Children will only understand at that level; and we are also like that. So if you don't have progression of revelation, we are stuck with a God that was explained 2000 years ago in a very primitive mindset and we don't understand what God is doing.

That's why the church continues to teach. It isn't just sermons we teach, but from time to time, the church puts out teaching called encyclicals on the family, birth control, nuclear armament, refugees - you name it, the church teaches. We need to understand what it is telling us at any given time.

So let's see what the progression is as we go into the gospel:

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is raising the bar and saying, "God is thinking even more differently than you understand." God is too big for you to limit to your interpretations - He is thinking even bigger.

Matthew 5:21-22

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

I was preaching and I said, "The Lord told me, 'You fool.'" "Somebody came to me very seriously and said, "The Bible has said not to call anybody a fool." That again is fundamentalism - because that's not what it means here. What it means here is, how you're dealing with other people. This is only a phrase they're using to explain it. You need to understand the context of a text, otherwise you can get stuck with fundamentalist interpretations.

Some people say, "Do you know the Pope is the antichrist?" ☺ So when I asked how they know that they say, "If you put his name and the second Christ words together it comes to 666, and the seven hills of Rome - that's where the antichrist is going to be." Of course! The book of revelation was written about the Romans and about the emperor of Rome; so it spoke about the seven hills - it is nothing to do with the Pope here. People who don't have any history get stuck with these interpretations because you don't have a broader perspective to understand.

Here he says that if you get stuck with it, then you're gone. Jesus is saying that you will grow broader as you journey with God. Now he is saying that murder is not only to kill somebody but murder is to slander people and ruin their name. In that sense - all of us are murderers. It's amazing, when you get angry or hurt, you look at the person who hurt you and you see a terrible person and all the evidence is pointing to that. Then when you reconcile with that person, all your evidence disappears. Otherwise you're convinced. Then you tell someone your evidence and after you have changed, that person is carrying your evidence and going forward.

In simple words: The new revelation is to recognize your God living in other people. That's what Jesus said: The least that you do unto my brothers; that you do unto me. Recognize your God, give an inner response to your God in them.

Unfortunately, if you don't recognize God within your own life, you're not going to recognize God in other people.

So I tell everyone, before becoming an evangelist or someone who is going to change the world - allow God to change you. The more you have a revelation of how God is dealing with you, you will reflect that back to other people. You need to grow in that.

It's always good to allow God to minister to your life. Forget about trying to minister to other people. That's my own principle in working. I'm convinced that I'm called to a personal, inner journey with God. If God is giving me a revelation, He will make it possible to take it from my heart and give it to others. My call is to have something with Him. A lot of us are wounded and broken and our woundedness tells us that recognition from other people is the way to go. So we use religion and use what we are doing to receive recognition from other human beings, without realizing it is our woundedness that is doing it

and that we haven't really been healed by the Lord. It is important to have this personal journey with the Lord.

Yesterday I spoke about praying for a person who is having cancer. A question was raised and I thought I'd answer that. The question was: You do all you're supposed to do, you hold on to the words of God - and yet nothing happens. What do you do? That is the reality of life. Sometimes, you're praying but nothing happens. There is a reflection given by a French priest for today's Magnificat and I thought it gives a beautiful insight into that answer:

I have often observed that people in difficult situations who come to terms with their inability to understand everything...

- I am having a disease and I don't know why.
- I'm going through a crisis - I know I don't deserve it but I'm going through it.
- I'm going through this terrible persecution and I can't fathom it.
- I'm going through a terrible relationship and I can't understand it.
- I don't have an answer.

What happens is, because we are beings that have been trained to lead with the mind, we keep asking the question why? If you keep asking why, it's only going to delay what God can do in your life.

It's an important factor for all of us - for me especially, because I realized that I lead with my mind. Immediately I want a reason and once I get a reason I'm comfortable with it. "Because I did this, this happened." Then I change it and I'm comfortable because I'm in control. We are always trying to find a reason. Is it because I did this that this happened? Then I'm safe because I have a process that I can comprehend.

What happens if you don't have an answer?

...and begins to ask what God wants of them, here and now, receive enlightenment little by little.

There is a shift that you can do: Instead of asking why, you can ask, "What does God want now?" It immediately changes the whole thing. You don't ask, "Why did this happen to me?" You don't say, "This happened, that happened, it didn't happen to so-and-so, my child doesn't have it - Why? Why? Why?" Instead of asking why and wasting your time, you can ask, "What does the Lord want me to do now?"

When you do that one thing that God wants you to do now, quietly, He will show you the next one and the next one. Then He will guide us through it all. I think it's so important for the lessons in life - for many never learn this. We are bitter, disappointed, caught up, we repeat the mistakes because we are asking why. How many people come and cry bitter tears and ask, "Why did this happen to me? Why did I make the wrong choice? Why did we go into this kind of marriage? Why did I get this sickness?" If you keep asking why, you're going to get stuck with it. Instead of asking why, you ask what - what is the Lord expecting from me now?

You take that little step and you get progression of revelation. Then He gives you the next one and the next one and the next one. For me, the greatest example is the disciple of Joseph Vaz - Jacome Gonsalves. He was a very educated man and was teaching in the University of Goa. He came here to assist Joseph Vaz - but history will record that he got a stroke and was unable to move around

and he couldn't speak properly. That led him to write. He learnt Sinhala and Tamil, and he wrote Christian and catholic literature that made the faith indigenous.

If you go to Duwa and watch the Passion play, you'll see that it is coming down from centuries, from Jacome Gonsalves who wrote the Passion play, so that people could understand the Passion of Christ. So they are using the same language of the time to make it accessible. That may not have happened if he was fully able bodied and was running around dispensing the sacraments like the other priests did.

Instead of asking why it happened to him, he asked, "What do you expect me to do now?" When he asked what he was to do, the Lord said, "You write." The Lord's Prayer, the Passion plays, the long reflections on the life of Jesus - that has made catholic literature a part of the historical process.

That is the mystery of God.