

## LENT 2017 – Day 10 – March 15th

Today's theme as I reflect on the readings is: **Stubborn hearts.**

The question we are dealing with this morning is,

- Why are we in rebellion with God?
- Why are we having this issue within us?
- Why isn't it easy to be aligned with God and live this life effortlessly?

This is something we need to look at. If you see the first verse in the first reading, it speaks to us:

*Isaiah 1:10*

*Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah!*

**Isaiah is speaking not to Sodom and Gomorrah, but to the people of Israel** - but he is calling them Sodom and Gomorrah. It's interesting to find out why he does that. Sodom and Gomorrah are famous for its rebellion. Sodom and Gomorrah were the cities in sin that God saw and was going to destroy. So even today in the world, so many people who do evil and wrong, who act lustfully. If they didn't do that, life would be such an easy thing. Today the reading talks about the rebellion inside of us.

There is an app for those who are using smartphones. It is called News360. It is an amazing app to have because it programmes your news according to your interests. After some time, the news you're looking at constantly, they will trawl the whole internet and get it for you. So it is like a customized newspaper. All the topics you're dealing with will be looked at every day and they will give you updated news. One of the things that I was reading yesterday was about the functioning of the human immune system. It was speaking about a heart specialist who was looking through the microscope at the cells of a transplanted heart. When they're looking at this through the microscope, they saw that the cells of the transplanted heart were being attacked vigorously by the immune system. The immune system is blind to the fact that it is this host heart that is keeping it alive. Because it's blind to that fact, it's main intention is to get rid of the heart. It has recognized this heart as an intruder, and this immune system attacks this intruder with its whole strength. In many cases it succeeds and you call it a rejection of the organ. When it succeeds, the patient also dies.

**In the same way, we have a natural defense system and it has evolved over millions of years.** This natural defense system within us is working for our good - at least it is thinking it is working for our good. So it pushes us to do things or to behave in certain ways - convinced that that is going to answer every need and solve every problem.

**Unfortunately, that defense system and that natural system doesn't have a brain.** It is instinctual. So it worked well when we were in the jungle. That's why our system within us has the fight or flight syndrome. When you have a danger, either you run away or you fight. So to fight or to run away, a lot of

internal energy is released. Unfortunately now we are living in civilization and you can't fight and there's no flight as well. So we are running the engine with nowhere to go.

**So we say we are having stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, migraines because the internal system is still primitive and running within.** Sometimes when we are not grown or developed, we use terrible methods to solve our problems - like screaming, shouting, hurting and attacking. You're not doing it just to hurt, because you and I are convinced that if you hurt them deeply enough, your problem will be solved. That it is creating a hundred other problems, I don't realize. My development is not developed enough to realize that there may be better alternative methods.

**So we are victims and we get stuck with this. People who are less developed are always getting hijacked into that kind of behavior.** Either they're angry and fighting with everybody, or they're sad and depressed all the time, or they feel misunderstood. These are typical behaviors that are coming from the internal defense system.

When you're younger, the sexual drive kicks in, and many people are driven by the sexual drive. They have a good intention to be better people - but when the drive takes over, they are manipulators and animals who are always looking for an opportunity. That they are actually driven by the animal instinct within, they are not able to understand.

**Can you see the problem of the internal nature of the human being? An outdated system is running us.** The problem is, we are living in civilization with an animal system working within. So that's why you have a small brush with another vehicle and suddenly the animals are out. You're driving a sophisticated vehicle with signals and computerized systems - but then the animal comes out and we behave in various ways.

When the sexual drive is strong, you're instinctively attracted and you use all your social skills but you're actually driven by an animal instinct. So you can see how polite boys become to girls and how they run behind them saying, "Yes sir, no sir, and three bags full sir, anything for you." I remember I spoke to a girl in a particular office. Those days when we used to do management, they used to give us people they were unable to deal with.

**So I was talking to this girl.** She has a first class degree from the university. That company recruits only the top and the very best. She was saying, the problem was, "My boyfriend doesn't understand me. He is fighting with me and we are constantly clashing and we have a very difficult relationship. But you must see my boss! He understands me, listens to me, if I have to go somewhere he will go and drop me." So I asked what about him and she said, "The only problem is he is married with two children." I said, "Though you're having a first class degree, you're not intelligent. Why do you think he's not kind to his wife and children and he's kind to you? He's driven by sexual instinct!" People leave marriages and get into these relationships, and when the instinct is satisfied, you're looking somewhere else.

**This is the problem of a sinful nature.** More than being guilty - we need to be aware. We say, "Oh God, I committed this sin," but we aren't dealing with it because we are not looking at the core and

meaning of this. The meaning is that we are running from the base operating system and not from any higher place. The more you run from there, the more trouble you're going to have and the more trouble you're going to be to other people.

**The Lord is offering us a solution:**

*Isaiah 1:18*

*"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."*

God is able to fix this. That's why we are called into a relationship with God. God is calling us into a relationship not to reward us for our good behaviour. God is calling us in our brokenness, into a relationship, so that He can fix what wrong inside is.

I've said this in earlier years - we are spirit, soul and body - but people who are unredeemed are body, soul and spirit. The spirit is at the bottom, the body is leading them and the soul is the victim or the servant of the body. The soul is your mind, your intelligence and your emotions. They are all at the service of your body and its physical drives. Your spirit is almost dead. God designed us spirit, soul and body.

**But, the solution for everyone who is addicted, caught up, broken, messed up - find the Lord in your life, go to His feet.** That's the good news this morning. Salvation is that He has come to fix this problem.

Let's look at the gospel, as the gospel talks about an even bigger problem. It's called the religious problem:

*Matthew 23:1-3*

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."*

**The problem is complicated here: These people know the religion but their nature has not been redeemed.** It can happen to all of us. You can know the religion. Some of us can argue very well. I remember once we were at St. Paul's Milagiriya, and somebody came and introduced me to a person and said, "He knows the entire bible from top to bottom and he can help you." At that time we were young and everyone wants to help. They thought they could get a place in this by being helpers. So I went close to him to talk and the smell of alcohol almost made me drunk. Then somebody said, "He has been put out from so many places." He knows the Bible from start to finish, but he can't handle his addiction.

There are others who know how to explain the intricate truths of God, but are addicts to their sexual drive. There are some others who are unable to make a connection with God - they know the religion and theology but they cannot connect - so they are slaves to other people's attention and love.

They can't handle rejection and they run a mile when they are rejected; and they can't deal with attention - they become attached.

Then you begin to see that though they know the religion and theology, their behaviour is not yet redeemed. **Every one of us has this temptation.** We are growing, but we are growing in our understanding only. That's why, as Christians grow older, they become irrelevant because they give in to that nature and they also speak about religion. As we grow older we tend to do this and we justify our position saying, "Of course we know it all - we are the best advisers. We can tell people exactly what to do."

**Matthew 23:4**

*They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*

They tell people what to do, but the bigger problem is below:

**Matthew 23:5-6**

*Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues...*

## The problem is;

- that they haven't yet touched God,
- they haven't yet experienced God –
- or they have experienced God and lost it.

**Why?** Because basking and dwelling in the appreciation of men is so much easier than dealing with an invisible God. We are talking to God, we are trying to work it out with Him, trying to figure out if He is there or not there, unsure if you actually hear His voice. There are so many issues.

On the other hand you have people actually appreciating, loving, caring - and then you get stuck. When we love people like that, we also hate some others like that. We are unbalanced. Like we are attached, we reject people out of hand. Jesus said, "They are having a problem. Though they are religious, they have lost God." It can happen to us too. Though we are religious, we can lose God - lose God with the attention of other people, lose God by showing off or pretending to be spiritual while internally having no connection with God. **That's why having a prayer life is so important.** Now I'm convinced that if you don't have a regular prayer life, before long, we become like the Pharisees. Human appreciation, human love, human rejection, human positions become so important.

**In 1981, when I was in my 20's, I was made one of the five leaders of the renewal.** I thought I had arrived because I had become one of the top guys of the movement. After a few years, you get papers to sign, and the first thing my eye used to go for is, "What is my position in the list? Am I at 3 or 2?" I knew I couldn't be number 1 because there was someone else there. If I'm 4th I'm

really upset, because that position in that paper meant so much for us. We were doing a spiritual act but we got lost in these little things of life.

**If you don't have a prayer life, that's where you'll end up.** Receiving advice and knowing the right thing won't help if you don't have a prayer life. What I'm seeing is, many who labour don't have enough prayer because we think our labour is prayer. After some time we can lose the whole thing. Now is a good time to work it out.

**Today's Magnificat has this reflection written by a Mexican and it is beautiful:**

*The spiritual life is indubitably a continual ascent since perfection consists in union with God.*

He is saying that the spiritual life is to continuously climb up because it is a union with God ... *and God stands above all creation. To arrive at God we must ascend, but the paradox that I emphasize lies in this:*

*That the secret of ascending is to descend.* This is an amazing truth. The secret of climbing towards God is actually to come down. John the Baptist says, "I must decrease that He must increase." For Him to increase in our lives, the paradox is that we must become little.

**The problem of the Pharisees was that they were trying to become big.** "You are trying to take my position - who do you think you are anyway?" Sometimes when I go to some churches that is the same approach I get. "Who do you think you are? You're intruding into our space." I'm secretly glad because if you have that attitude, the one thing that is going to happen to you is you're going to lose God and walk by yourself because you're full of your own position.

**To ascend you have to descend.** *St. Augustine in his inimitable style this explains this paradox: Consider O brethren the great marvel - God is on high. Reach up to Him and He flees from you. Lower yourself before Him and He comes down to you.* Here is the secret of the spiritual journey - becoming little, simple and unaffected because you're having a touch of God in your life.

*In the spiritual life, souls humble themselves with more or less effort - yet ever retaining the conviction that they must become little.* Our goal is to become little - not to become great. "Don't they know who I am? Are they showing me enough respect after all I'm doing for them?" That is to become big. To become little is to open the door into the heart of God.

**I'd just like to share something else before we finished:** This reflection is from Henri Nouwen, the priest I spoke about earlier. **He says:** *It is often in our absence that the Spirit of God manifests itself. When Jesus left his disciples, he said, "It is for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Paraclete, the Spirit, will not come to you. However, when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will lead you to the complete truth." It was only in Jesus' absence that His friends discovered the full meaning of His presence. It was only in His absence that they completely understood His words and experienced full communion with Him.*

**The temptation we have is to control the lives of people who are close to us.**

**Why? We think we are doing them a favour.** So they also have a tendency to depend on us - children and parents; even as a movement. But when you become dependent, what happens is, you stop discovering God in your own life. That's why everyone needs a space to find God. Thank God I have realized this over the years, and that's why so many people work with me.

A lot of people don't understand this. When they have a crisis and a problem, most often the crisis and problem is with someone else. They come to me, expecting me first of all to be the judge and second to intervene; third, to solve the problem according to their liking. They insist on this and say, "Please do this for me."

**God has given me the grace not to get into it. Why? Because it is in that space that you will find your God.** If someone else is always solving your problem you'll never grow into intimacy with God. We need to find Him - and most of the time you'll have to find Him in those struggles. Those who work with us know that by now. There are 25 of us who work in the office together. So over 20 people in a confined space is dynamite. There was a time when everyone was seriously dissatisfied with everybody else and somehow they think I'm to blame for that. "Why isn't he fixing these people?" they ask.

But today I'm beginning to see how beautifully people are learning to deal with the others through the inner space they are finding from God. Now we work together in the most amazing way. Of course, the witnesses are there - but we have learnt to find the inner space. The mistake we made in the movements before is we didn't understand that. So we tried to control everybody, run the system properly, work it out in such a way that everybody behaves properly - and in the end, people were following human beings and not really finding God in their crisis.

**So God is waiting to be found in the struggle you're having today -** but you need to lose Him, seek Him by yourself, sit at His feet, and suddenly you'll find Him giving you insights into seeing the problem and the people differently. Remember, when you see someone differently, the whole situation changes. We don't want to see people differently, but we want to change people. When will we learn that it is the change within us that is going to change them? Today is that day.