

CROSSROADS CAMP AT HAZELBROOK - SEPTEMBER 1990
HOMILY ON THE SUBJECT, "THE DIGNITY OF THE PERSON".

Reading: John 8:2-11

INTRODUCTION:

Many years ago, I was invited to a parish to relieve while the minister was on extended leave. He took me to the Hospital to meet some of those to whom I would be ministering.

The first person I met was an elderly man who had a terminal illness. He was very bitter and angry — and expressed himself in those terms. For example, he said, “The only time the Church ever visited me, was when you wanted money. I’ve got nothing now!”

Then looking at the minister, he said, “What do you want from me? - you don’t care about me — do you?” The minister replied, “I am not able to answer your question.” There was silence — then he led me away.

I could feel the hurt in that old man. I could feel the loneliness that was his. I could feel the rejection that had been hurting him. He had no sense of dignity.

There is nothing worse than a feeling of rejection. Human dignity is destroyed. We are thrown into an abyss of grief and loneliness that is like no other.

Early next morning, I went to the Hospital to visit this old man. He was in a semi-coma. I held his hand gently — and prayed. He squeezed my hand. Not long after I left his bedside, the old man died. But he did not die alone.

He is in the presence of One who had cared for him all along. He hadn’t known it — until he was about to reach the end of his journey of life.

GOD – THE SOURCE OF HUMAN DIGNITY:

God — is the source of our human dignity. Without God, the greatness of the human person — loses its ultimate significance. Not only is human dignity God’s concern, it is our concern. Every person has the right to discover his or her human worth.

I was in Singapore a number of years ago. While I was there, I visited a Chinese family in their home. As I was being shown into the sitting room, my eye caught sight of the mother. She had snatched her daughter to take her to another room. She was handicapped.

For the young girl to be whisked away and hidden — was to take away her dignity — her sense of worth – her own self-respect.

“No! — don’t take her away”, I called out, “Bring her to me”. Her mother brought her to me in the sitting room. The little girl was profoundly retarded.

“Hello!” I said to her, “Let’s sit on the floor together.” I kneeled on the floor. She kneeled down too, facing me.

Quite spontaneously I said to her, “Now, I am going to clap my hands together, like this.” And I clapped my hands together. “Now, I am going to hold them out like this, and I want you to do the same.”

So I began, “One and two – one and two.” This little girlie did the same. “One and two – one and two.” Our hands met together in touch love.

She jumped up quickly and ran into her room. Her mother followed after her. Then her mother, looking across to me, called out, “She is laughing— She is laughing! You have made her happy. You are the first man she has ever taken to”. She had her dignity restored.

God works through human relationships to restore human dignity. The worth and greatness of every person — is wrapped up in God. God comes to us in the incarnation of Jesus through human lives — in human relationships. How good God is! - How important you are!

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHERS IS A MAJOR SOURCE OF DIGNITY:

If — through your relationships with others, God has become important to you and you believe that your whole destiny is bound up in Him. If you have found in Him — a Friend — who loves you — a friend who cares for you it is possible for you to have peace of mind, whatever your circumstances.

Friendship with God. Friendship with one another, is a major source of our dignity and peace. Especially do I say — “Without God dignity loses its worth.”

Many a person has died not from old age but because dignity has been denied them. Jesus— died of a broken heart.

The Church — in embracing human concern responds to God’s call — to go out into the world and make disciples of all people. Not by quoting a lot of scriptural texts to them. Not by being a “goodie” — trying to manipulate the sinner into change...

But by loving them simply because Christ loves them whether they know it or not. Loving them in human relationships so that both they and we grow together in an awareness of the Goodness and Love of Christ in humble acceptance of one another.

In this way we raise the dignity of another — helping them to find their true worth and rightful place in society. When this takes place — we raise the level of our own dignity - in fulfilling the Law of Christ.

Do not be afraid then — to look into yourselves - and accept your own poverty — your own weakness — your incapacity to relate — your depression — your fear — your loneliness — and believe in God — believe in yourself — and believe in others. And by your inner self — be strengthened.

PRAYER

May God bless you may you be a blessing to others;
May you treasure one another in your hearts;
May you seek to understand one another’s ways;
May you grow in wisdom and grace before God and man.
AMEN.