

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

5 July 2009

(Given at Our Lady of Good Counsel Monastery in Kampala, Uganda)

- 2000 years ago our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who is the Word Made Flesh, was born of the Virgin Mary and dwelt among us. He performed countless miracles: healing the lame, casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, even raising people from the dead.
- And He did all of this not simply to show forth the *power* of God, a power so strong that it controls the very forces of nature - even death itself - but also to show forth the *nature* of God, which is love. Because of this, many hearts were turned back to God.
- While many people experienced healing in their bodies because of the miracles Jesus performed, many, many more experienced healing in their hearts and souls, which is much more miraculous and important than the healing of a physical ailment.
- Yet while many hearts were turned toward God by Jesus' great miracles, many others made the choice to give in to the sins of pride, jealousy, and anger.
- Because of their hardness of heart, because of their refusal to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, our Lord was eventually arrested, wrongly condemned, scourged, tortured, publicly mocked and humiliated, and executed amongst common criminals in the most heinous fashion.
- Perhaps it seems incredible to us that people could be so short-sighted, so hard of heart, so wantonly cruel in the face of the great love manifested by Christ in His teaching and miracle-working, but such is the power of the human will when it is immersed in sin and selfishness.
- Since the days of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, we have been wounded in the very depths of our being. In theological terms we refer to this primordial wound as original sin.
- This original sin, committed by Adam and Eve, was the choice of self over God, the choice of fear over faith, the choice of pride, greed, and hatred over humility, generosity and love.
- And so serious was this sin, so far-reaching its effects, that every human person ever born in the history of mankind - save our Lord and His Immaculate Mother - has been marked by it.
- But because our Lord is Love, He has given us a remedy: the Sacrament of Baptism! This wonderful sacrament, which recalls the purifying floods of Noah's Day, the passing of the Israelites from the bondage they knew in Egypt to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea, and the baptism of our Lord in the Jordan by John the Baptist, forgives our original sin and forges a covenantal relationship between us and God such that we become His very sons and daughters!
- As we pass through the cleansing waters of baptism, the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit are planted within us as are the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In short, in this sublime sacrament we are given the grace not only to *be* the sons and daughters of God, but also the grace to *live* as God's sons and daughters!
- Yet even with the beautiful graces that come with baptism, we must still choose - even daily - to live according to God's will, for our human nature remains wounded, even though we are redeemed by our Lord's death and resurrection.
- We still have the propensity to sin, and if left unchecked, this propensity to sin that is within all of us can make us into monsters.
- Certainly this beautiful continent of Africa, and even this country of Uganda, is no stranger to the ugliness of human sin. You who live here have experienced - and in some countries continue to experience - the devastating effects of those who have not only turned away from

God and His holy will, but who have subjected entire peoples and nations to the tyranny of their evil desires.

- Yet in the face of violence, bloodshed, hardship, suffering and even the cruelties of tyranny, the Christian's response is not one of despair or even fear.
- For those of us who know and love Christ, for those of us who bear His name on our souls, we are called to respond in faith, hope, and most importantly, in love. For as our Lord's resurrection plainly shows us, He is more powerful than the greatest of evils - even death itself.
- And what we must constantly bear in mind is that either we are for Him or against Him. We are either moving toward God or away from Him. We are either in a state of grace or in a state of mortal sin. For there can be no middle ground with something (or someone) as absolute as God Himself!
- And so it is that we must choose, and do so daily (if not at every moment). And the choice we must make is life over death, faith over fear, humility over pride, generosity over greed, love over hate, God over self.
- Not only must we choose, but out of charity we must help others to do the same! In other words, we must be willing to be a prophetic witness to Christ in the world.
- Both our first reading and Gospel today speak of the prophetic witness that God calls us to. Ezekiel speaks today of how he has been sent by God to the rebellious house of Israel. And the Gospel of Mark tells of how Jesus visited Nazareth, yet was unable to perform any mighty deeds there because of the lack of faith.
- Yet the Lord tells Ezekiel that he has to speak the Lord's message, regardless of whether the people heed or resist. For in God's eyes what is most important is not whether we succeed or fail, but whether we have been faithful to what He's asked of us. With God obedience is the ultimate measure, not worldly success.
- So many times when we examine our lives and realize the difficulties of living according to God's will or of trying to accomplish the tasks He has set before us, we may become discouraged. When we consider our sins and weaknesses, we may be tempted to despair.
- But at those times we must remind ourselves of the words of St. Paul that we hear in the second reading today: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness," and "for when I am weak, then I am strong."
- You see, my friends, it is when we humbly acknowledge our weaknesses that we actually dispose ourselves to submit to God rather than relying on our own wisdom, power, or capacities.
- When we fail to submit to God, like the people of Nazareth in today's Gospel, God's power is not made manifest in our lives. But when we do humbly submit to God, all things become possible!
- As we look across the 2000 years of our Catholic history, it's not difficult to find countless examples of men and women who have faced terrible difficulties in doing the will of God and yet managed to remain faithful to our Lord.
- This continent has produced many martyrs, like those at Carthage in the early centuries of the Church, and even in modern times, like St. Charles Lwanga, who are perfect examples of people who have done God's will in the midst of adversity.
- It is continent as well that produced the great St. Augustine, who - though not a martyr - was a saint who faced many temptations to turn away from God's will, and yet still humbled himself before God.

- As we consider the challenges of our own vocations, let us turn to these great men and women for their help and intercession. And ultimately, let us place all of our trust in God Himself, who will help us in all our needs.
- May God bless and keep you always.