

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 10, 2018
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

“Joey, where are you?”

When I was growing up, the family that lived behind us had several children. Their house backed up against the woods, and the kids often played outside.

One of their children, Joey, loved to play ‘hide and seek.’ He’d find nooks and crannies in the woods and hide there while the game was on. Eventually everyone had to look for him. And one of his younger sisters would yell in a sing-song voice, “Joey, where are you.”

When you’re young, it can be really fun to hide.

But when Joey turned 16, he got involved with drugs. Things spiraled out of control. There were countless nights when his parents simply did not know where he was.

They tried everything to help him – counselling, rehab, support. They pleaded with him to understand that whatever he was looking for, he wasn’t going to find it in narcotics.

He didn’t listen.

One night, his brother came through the woods, asking if we could come to their house. Joey’s parents were out in their cars, looking for him.

His little sister – the one who used to look for him in the woods – was on the phone with Joey. He was threatening suicide. His sister kept asking, “Joey, where are you? We want to come find you. *Where are you?*”

He never told his sister where he was. The state police found him three days later, dehydrated and incoherent.

I wish I could tell you that this was the beginning of Joey’s healing. But there were many other nights when they could not find him.

Years earlier, it was fun when his sister sang, “Joey, where are you?” It was heartbreaking to hear her plead on the phone, “Joey, where are you?”

Did you notice the first thing God says in today's first reading? God asks Adam and Eve, "Where are you?"

Now remember: Adam and Eve are the only two people on the planet at that point! God doesn't have a billion people to keep an eye on!

And... God had just created the human body in all of its complexity. God had created the world with its magnificent interconnectedness. If God could do all of this, do you really think that God would NOT know where Adam and Eve are?

God knows where they are. So, in asking the question, maybe God is teaching *us* something important.

Where are you, human beings? And how did you get there?

Remember what God did in the Book of Genesis just before this: God creates the whole world, with its beauty and wonder.

God creates us, male and female, in God's image. God gives humanity everything we could possibly need. God gives us a task – tend this garden, be good stewards of creation.

Male and female are in right relationship with God, with each other, and with creation. We call it paradise. Eden.

Genesis says that Adam and Eve are *naked*. No, this is not some trendy nudist beach! The nakedness of Adam and Eve means that they have *nothing to hide*. There is no *shame*. There literally is nothing between themselves and each other, nothing between them and God.

Human beings, with our vulnerability, could stand before each other and God with complete transparency. Nothing to hide. Nothing standing between us. The truth of me, standing before the truth of you, and the truth of God.

And then... *sin happens*. They listen to the Tempter. They conclude that they do not need God to tell them how to live – they can make those decisions in isolation! They eat the fruit – they reject God's wisdom.

And what happens to human beings because of sin? Well look at the results in today's first reading -

+ because of sin, humans decide that we have to hide, or at least try to hide

+ because of sin, humans who used to be able to be transparent with each other now need to cover up: fig leaves - barriers between me, you and God.

+ because of sin, we start blaming someone else for the choices we've made. 'It's Eve's fault. It's your fault, God, for putting that woman here. It's the snake's fault. It's everyone's fault... but my own.'

+ because of sin, two formerly-loving human beings are now divided, blaming, hiding.

This is what happens when we don't listen to God! The serpent promised that they would find happiness if they just ate the forbidden fruit. But Adam and Eve learn a lesson which we all must apparently learn the hard way: *sinful actions never deliver the happiness that they promise*. The fruit of the forbidden tree just makes us miserable and angry. We hide.

Human lives are still ruined in the same way. The pill I took didn't make me happy: it just made me sicker, more addicted. That bourbon didn't solve my sadness. Gambling didn't make me happy. Stealing didn't fulfill my desires. Adultery didn't satisfy my longing.

Years ago, after studying this passage of the Book of Genesis, I changed the way I prayed. For the next two months, whenever I sat down to pray, I did this:

I pictured God saying to me, "Michael, where are you?"

When God asks, "Michael, where are you," God is asking:

+ Michael, where are you in your prayer life? Are you praying? Are you listening?

+ Michael, where are you in your relationships? Are you being honest? Are you being generous and selfless?

+ Michael, where are you in your discipleship? Are you asking Jesus to guide you? Are you willing to do what Jesus did?

+ Michael, where are you? Are you looking for love in all the wrong places, are you looking for happiness in stuff that is bad for you?

+ Michael, where are you? Are you hiding? If so, why?

+ Michael, where are you? Are you sewing new fig leaves for yourself? Why do you think that the truth can be hidden?

+ Michael, where are you? Are you blaming others for your mistakes or your unhappiness?

+ Michael, where are you? Are you trying to build a human community where people can once again live in right relationship with themselves, each other, creation and God? If not, why not?

+ Michael, where are you? Why are you telling yourself that Jesus does not know what He's talking about when he invites you to obey his Gospel.

For a time, Adam and Eve were able to stand naked before each other and God. They were transparent, honest, vulnerable. Nothing to hide.

Think of how much energy we expend, concealing, blaming, chasing fulfillment in things we know can't bring us happiness. How much energy do we expend, trying to hide from the God of the universe, hide from each other, from ourselves.

Please remember: when God asks, "where are you," that same God is already here! God asks, "where are you," but God is also saying, "Wherever you are, I'm already there!"

Even when we make the mistake of trying to hide, Jesus, the good shepherd, goes looking for the lost sheep.

No matter where you are, Christ already *is*.

No matter what you are trying to hide, Christ already knows it. And he is there, forgiving you.

No matter where your fears have driven you, Christ is already there to give you peace.

No matter where you're sewing some fig leaves, Jesus is already there, saying, 'you don't need that.'

If you ever find yourself in a place you don't belong, doing what you shouldn't be doing, listen to how God is calling out, "Where are you?"

Just say (without fear), "Here I am Lord, I got myself lost."

And he will say to you, "It's ok. Let's find our way home."