

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time
St. Mary Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael Renninger

“God did not make death.”

Did you hear that?

“God did not make death.”

That is the very first sentence of today’s first reading from the Book of Wisdom.

This passage reminds us – because we NEED reminding! – of God’s original plan for human beings.

And what do we hear? We hear that God created everything, and everything was very good. Every human being is created in God’s image. When we remember that, we treat one another with justice and mercy. Life is precious.

“God did not make death.” In fact, once death has entered into human experience because of our willingness to ignore God and live without him (we call that “sin”), God nevertheless keeps saying “yes” to life, and “no” to death.

Isn’t that what Jesus is doing in today’s Gospel?

Every parent in this Church should be able to identify with the man who approaches Jesus. His name is Jairus. He has a little girl. And she is very sick.

On some level, can’t we all identify with Jairus? The one he loves is dying, and he would give anything if someone could help his little girl.

As Jairus is speaking with Jesus, the word arrives: ‘your little girl has died.’ Is there anything worse in the world than that? Is there anything that parents fear more?

Every fiber of Jairus’ being must screaming “no” to this death.

But what Jairus discovers is this: *Every fiber of Jesus’ being is also screaming “no” to death!* They go to the house. Jesus touches the body of the dead child. And in that sacred moment, Jesus

puts into action the words which we heard at the start of the Book of Wisdom: “God did not make death.” God is about life, and hope, and healing.

The little girl arises. And everyone is astonished. Wouldn't *you* be astonished?

In his every word and every action in Mark's Gospel, Jesus keeps showing us that the Book of Wisdom is telling the truth. “God did not make death.” Our God is about life, and compassion, and generosity.

In the end, Jesus proves this point on the cross. I once heard a preacher say that, on Good Friday, Jesus was showing us how to ‘befriend’ death. The preacher said that, if we watch Jesus embracing his death, we will learn how to embrace our own deaths.

But, I think this preacher made a mistake, because he forgot the rest of the story. If the story ENDED on Good Friday, then perhaps Jesus IS showing us how to ‘make friends’ with death.

But on Easter Sunday, we see the rest of the story. And the rest of the story is this: Jesus did not ‘make friends’ with death on the cross. Jesus humbly accepted death on the cross *so that death could be defeated*.

If death is our friend, then Jesus would have stayed dead. If death is really the solution to our problems, then Jesus would have stayed in the tomb.

But death is not our friend, nor is it the solution to our problems. Which is why, on Easter Sunday, the tomb is empty, and the stone rolled back. “He is risen!” The resurrection of Christ is the ultimate proof of what the Book of Wisdom proclaimed: God is not in the death business. God is in the life business!

God is not in the death business. But... *we are*. Just look at our world. So many people have embraced Satan's lie, and they have come to believe that death is our friend, and that death is the best solution to our problems.

So... in Maryland, a man with a grudge against a newspaper decides – death is the solution to my problem!

In Iraq and Syria, where ancient conflicts continue to rage, angry people with expensive weapons keep killing others. Death is the solution to my problem.

In England, hospital staff members are accused of carrying out a massive euthanasia scheme for decades. Apparently, over 450 were put to death by the doctors and nurses there. Death is the

solution.

In the halls of congress, angry voices denounce immigration policies which separate children from parents. Our bishops have raised their voices about this tragedy as well. But I also observe that many of those in congress who are complaining about this mistreatment of immigrant children are the same ones who defend what happens to children in the death factories of Planned Parenthood.

Since abortion was legalized in 1973, approximately 50 million American children have lost their lives through abortion. Do the lives of those children not require adamant defense? Or, for those 50 million, is death really the solution?

Gun violence that terrorizes city streets. Domestic violence which creates horror at home. Conservative voices calling for expanded use of the death penalty. Liberal voices calling for the legalization of suicide.

Underneath it all is a lie – the lie which says, “death is the solution to our problems.”

That lie has been told very well in recent years. So we, God’s people, must become bold in telling God’s truth.

We Catholics are in a unique place in our country’s current angry rhetoric. Why? Because, if we are *truly* being Catholic, we will not fit in to any political category. We believe that God did not make death. We believe that God is about life. We believe that life must be respected and protected at every stage and in every circumstance. Which means that Catholics will disagree with CNN and Fox, all at the same time... if we are actually being Catholic.

To be a Catholic means that I passionately proclaim the value of the life of every child in the womb. And I also proclaim the dignity of every child outside the womb, including the immigrant child, the poor child, the child whose mom is an addict.

To be a Catholic in today’s world means that I passionately proclaim the value of every human life: the elderly person in hospice care, the uninsured person who needs quality health care, the prisoner facing the death penalty.

To be a Catholic means that I passionately proclaim that caring for creation is caring for life. That helping a poor person who has hit a bump in the road is not optional – it is who we are as Catholics. And our Catholic theology also teaches us that work – honest, hard work – is one of the key aspects to a life of meaning and purpose for women and men.

The forces of divisiveness want you to slap a label on yourself, to put yourself in a political box, and to fall in line with the marching orders which come down from the talking heads on cable TV and talk radio.

But you are more than a label. You are a child of God. You are created in his image. You know that the answers to life's complex question usually don't find their solutions on cable TV shows. You know that life's questions begin to find their answers in one person – Jesus Christ – and his Gospel.

And if we follow Christ faithfully, and learn his Gospel carefully, we will soon discover that we are able to bring new insight to every set of assumptions, and offer honest critiques of every overly-simplified solution.

None of that is easy. And it cannot be done in isolation. Which is why we must keep gathering together, around the proclamation of God's Word and the Table of the Eucharist. It is here that we meet the Christ of Mercy. It is here that he forms our consciences. It is here that he nourishes us. It is here that we receive the reminder we desperately need in difficult days: God did not make death. God is a God of life. And we are People of his life, sent to bring the Good News of that life to a world which hungers for hope.

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