

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

Easter 7, year B

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Pr. Robert M. Goldstein

Going Home

Texts: John 14:10b

In the Gospel reading, Jesus says that he is going home to God. What could this mean for you and for me?

“Going home” -- what a wonderful thought! Home is that place where you can be yourself. Perhaps home is your apartment, your house or just your room. But it’s home to you. Where you can throw off your shoes, change your clothes and relax. Where you do what you want to do. Where you feel safe, snug and secure. It’s so good to get home!

But going home is not always fun. When I was eight years old, I remember my mother in our formal living room, dusting. I remember coming into the room and glancing at the two beautiful vases sitting grandly at the ends of a long credenza. They were about 30 inches high and richly decorated in Edwardian style.

My mother had that amazing mind-reading power. “Now Robert, don’t you touch those vases. They were a wedding gift from my mother.” As she left the room, she turned and gave me that mother’s look -- you know, a look that says it all in silence: “Don’t you touch them!”

.... I don’t know how it happened. The vase just slipped through my hands as if it were greased with butter, ...fell to the floor and broke into thousands of pieces! I didn’t stop to count. I ran.

.... Playing with my friends was very comforting that day. I didn’t really feel like dinner. Yes, that’s right, who wants to eat all the time anyway! I wasn’t hungry. I could

stay out here all night! But when the dusk turned to darkness, and my playmates left me all alone by the dim light of the lamppost, I began to feel my prospects for future happiness becoming very bleak indeed. I went home.

Going home isn't always fun. I went home to an angry mother, and the hard, coarse hand of my father, and the indignant self-righteous contempt of my brothers (who could have just as easily done it!). Since sitting down was not very comfortable that night, I slipped off to bed and I consoled myself on my pillow. At least I was home.

Some people look at life that way. They feel they have wronged God and others so deeply that they dread the final trumpet call. It's not a great way to die, and, more importantly, it's not a great way to live. For then, one is living life in guilt and fear; living for some future abstract eternal life and, in the process, forgetting to live the one life God has given us all. That is the religion of drought, desiccated by guilt, a dried up flesh. Going home to God is total dried out dread.

Few people are unafraid of death. After all, death means the total contradiction of all our instincts to survive and live. We cannot eliminate evolution's deep instincts for self-survival. But we do not need to burden death with layers of guilt. This is how the Christ is Savior for us. Christ saves us from ourselves, from our deepest feelings of guilt. Christ saves us from ourselves.

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us." We recite that again and again. But do we dare to jump in with God's gracious power to help us to forgive and to ask others for forgiveness?

If we accept the peace that is from God, perhaps we will have such clarity and simplicity of faith that we, like St. Francis, shall be able to say, "Come brother death. Take me home." Going home.

We all have "broken vases" in our lives. I do not mean actual vases -- - but having

hurt those who love us. To come to admit this to ourselves hurts more than any hard hand on one's butt. I had hurt my mother and I felt just awful.

My mother really treasured those vases. It was as if her deceased mother and father were present in those grand vases standing on the credenza. I now realize what memories must have been attached to them! And now her second son had taken a personal treasure away from her. Her life was made a little less that day, and for the many days ahead whenever she would pass that empty space. I wish I had listened to her. But it was too late.

One day I resolved to put the vase back together -- - to literally make amends. Have you ever seen the handiwork of an eight-year-old gluing together pieces of china? Even I could see it didn't look good at all. Smudges of glue and cracks and holes that wouldn't go away. We all face our pasts like that in some way. We wish, in a humpty-dumpty way, to put it all back together again. But we can't. And then we live with a string of regrets, cracks and all.

When I last brought up the vases, my mother remembered it all right, because a slight frown still overtook her face. But she looked up at me, smiled and said, "You were a handful at times." And once again, I knew that her love for me was deeper and wider and taller and more beautiful than even that big, wide beautiful vase. Beyond her wrath, beyond her own emotional loss, was her gracious ability to forgive. She had put it all behind her and moved on. That's why I can go home.

That's how God is. We can always go home to God. Always, because Christ came to us -- - as us, flesh and blood and spirit. That's why Christ suffered for us -- so that we can always go home. We can always go home.

Whatever vases you have broken, even tried to fix and couldn't, should not haunt you with regrets, with guilt or death-dread. If you can still make amends, then you

ought to have the confidence of faith to try. But if it's too late, or you are rejected, then be like my mom. Put the broken vase behind you and move on with your life as she did.

"Going Home" -- what wonderful words! You will probably go home today after church. The joy of that simple experience is the clue to living the rest of your life. "I am coming to you. Holy Father," Jesus said. Now we know how wonderful it means for the rest of our lives! Can we remember that? Can we live like that?

I am coming home, Mom, motherly God. I am coming home to you.

Amen.

St. Francis Lutheran Church
152 Church Street, SF, CA 94114-1111
Phone: (415) 621-2635; Fax: (415) 621-8819
E-mail: StFrancisSF@sbcglobal.net
www.st-francis-lutheran.org