

SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

November 4, 2007

Text: Luke 6:20-31; Daniel 7:1-3

Pr. Robert Goldstein

“Turning to the Light

We gather today with a little of the shadows that sometimes gray our lives –shadows that follow our frames in both the sunshine and streetlight. We come together this day to gently remember those whom we have lost to death –and yet, by faith, not to the power of death. We come together this Sunday of All Saints to mourn our loss of our loved ones.

In the Great Thanksgiving this morning our presiding minister will proclaim to us and to the whole world, “with Francis and Clare and all the saints, with the choirs of angels, and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name.” With the words “and all the saints” we are thereby sweetly reminded that our beloved, who have gone before us, are worshipers too with us this day as we sing praises to the One who gives new life and who brings eternal life out of death itself.

There are times when we all feel like Daniel, in the first reading. Who hasn’t had frightening nightmares or the darkest of thoughts or the worst of fears? Daniel expresses this vividly as mighty winds tossing the great ocean into a boiling terror from which comes forth monstrous beasts.

Caught up in these terrors, Daniel talks to someone. And that someone speaks God’s reassuring Word to him: “no matter what may happen to you, God will ultimately be in control forever –forever and ever.” Words of comfort and hope for a man threatened by the shadows of death and the grave uncertainties of life in very difficult times. God is with us, forever and ever.

Sometimes we have trouble believing this. Especially when we are devastated by emptiness and helplessness in the face of the death monster. Sometimes we have our doubts when death hints its presence in the shadows and gray days of our lives. St. Francis of Assisi, I believe, said that death is like our shadow. It is not us, yet it is so close and so intangible.

Because of these shadows, because of death’s monstrous grip, God sent Jesus. We know this is true because of what Jesus said and did for us when he carried his own shadow and then ours too. Jesus takes on that burden when he dares to enter the terrors and shadows of his disciples who own nothing, have eaten nothing and whose only abundance is sorrow. Jesus dares to promise:

Blessed are you who are poor, for you are in the presence of God.

*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

These are God's promises –words of hope and comfort that turn us from dwelling in our shadows, turning us, instead, towards that great source of all light. Our shadow is always with us, but it is a shadow because of the light, the light of God who wondrously created sunshine and wondrously taught us to switch on electric lights in the dark. We do not belong to our shadows. Rather, we belong in the gracious light of the sun and science, the light of goodness and creation.

No matter how poor you may be, you have been baptized into the loving presence of God. You have these riches of eternal life. And together, as a people of God, we employ God's riches to us in a stewardship of seeking justice –our vision becoming Christ's hands and heart working for justice.

And if you are hungry, Jesus' promises you will be filled. Think of the meal programs St. Francis provides and participates in, and of the upcoming Thanksgiving meal; think how they carry out God's promise to the hungry. We are Christ's hands and heart as we fulfill Christ's promise that the hungry will be filled.

And if you weep, God promises that your tears of mourning shall turn into tears of laughter. Have you not listened to the pain of some beloved one or friend? Have you not seen the tears welling up in their eyes? And have you not embraced them with both arms and words of reassurance –even perhaps with a joke that brings forth laughter amidst their tears? Here too, we are Christ's hands and heart fulfilling Christ's promise to the mournful.

As we gather around the altar, we are all fed with a meal that never leaves us, never causes hunger. We are being fed eternal bread and eternal wine that are always joyous –even in the midst of life's disasters and tragedies. We are fed a meal that reminds us of the true wealth, the source of true happiness –Jesus Christ.

Our worship service today will conclude outside on the Memorial Terrace, naming our beloved dead and receiving God's benediction of Life. This beautiful Memorial Terrace is yet another exercise of the hands, minds and hearts of God's people at St. Francis Church –creating a space where Jesus' promise of weeping tuned into laughter is being fulfilled.

Even though your shadow is always with you, even though you will walk one day through the valley of the shadow of death, the gift of this gracious Memorial Terrace reminds us to turn from our shadow towards the gracious abundance of God's light. For remember, even when the days themselves are full of fog and clouds, above those clouds, always, is God's gracious sunshine and the purest of blue skies. Even then, in spite of contrary appearances, God has not forsaken us.

In the letter to the Ephesians the writer puts it eloquently:

For once you were darkness, but now in Christ you are light. Live as children of light —for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

Or consider those wonderful words of faith at the street entrance to this Memorial Terrace:

It is the same light that graces the dawn, blazes at noon, and bows to the evening shadows. In truth the light never leaves us, even in the darkest night.

People of light, let us turn from our shadows. Let us continue being the light God graciously calls us to be. Our world, locally and globally, needs that light of love of which Jesus speaks. By God's grace alone, we participate in carrying out Christ's very own promises. What a gift! What a delight! So beautiful is the light of the heavenly host and all the saints. Amen

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