31 C-purgatory

MDP of God

This week has had a lot going on—that I think today’s readings really do a great job of connecting everything that went on this week (especially the 1st reading and gospel)

1st—Friday was the Feast day of All Saints—when we as a Church celebrated our older brother ans sisters in Christ who are now with Jesus in the glory of heaven—who now reign with Jesus—*who have been made perfect* **and now share in God’s perfect joy**

 I think of that as my grandmother Nanny’s feast

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The feast of so many of the people I’ve known here at St Helen’s who’ve now been called home by the Lord—*and now reign with Him in glory*

But then 2ndly—on Saturday we celebrated the great feast of All Souls—that’s when we remember in a powerful way *that our lives are filled with meaning—*How’s that?

On All Souls we pray for the people who have died, but who are not quite ready for heaven

We pray for those who have gone before us that the fire of God’s love will consume all the sins that have clung to them—any anger—resentment—hatred—lust—indifference—greed—sloth –gluttony---*any sins that are a part of their lives*

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And that feast in a very powerful way reminds us *that our lives are filled with meaning*—how’s that?

Because the Book of Revelation tells us that nothing unclean enters into heaven—the Book of Hebrews speaks of *the “souls of the just made perfect”*

And the fact is that most of us when we leave this world aren’t perfect—*we need God’s grace to become perfect*—in fact we need the fire of God’s love to remove from our lives all the areas of imperfection we have

St Paul speaks of that in First Corinthians 3: 15ff—when he says how he’s laid a foundation in people’s lives—the foundation of course is Jesus---he says that’s the only foundation that will do for salvation

But then he goes on to say—now you’re building on that foundation and you need to be careful as to how you build

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He says you can build with “gold, silver or precious stones”—that would be our love—our obedience—our willingness to give of ourselves for God and others

Or St Paul says—we can build with “wood, hay or straw”—that would be our sins—our failures to love—our failures to obey God—our failure to give of ourselves for others

And he says, “the Day”—will test everyone’s work with fire---if the work stands the person will receive a reward (in that case the fire of God’s love will purify the gold, silver and precious stones within us)

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But then he says, “if someone’s work burns—**they’ll suffer loss**—*but they’ll be saved as one going through the fire”*

He’s basically saying –that the fire of God’s love will purify us so that we’ll be made perfect—*but because those sins are a part of who we are* **we’ll suffer loss** as those things are removed from us [so it will be painful]

So purgatory is such a hopeful thing—because we aren’t going to struggle with areas of sin through all eternity—*what a blessing that is*—**right?**

I can tell you I don’t want to be struggling with anger 10,000 years from now---and I won’t have too because that will be totally removed from my life in Purgatory

I don’t want to have to deal with lust for all eternity—and I won’t have too because that sin will be removed from my life by the fire of God’s love in Purgatory

I don’t want to struggle with pride or indifference—or sloth or gluttony for all eternity---and I don’t have to because all of those sins and failings will be removed from my life in Purgatory

So how does All Souls remind us that our lives have incredible meaning?

Because every day we can choose to be loving or unloving--- *usually not just once a day*, **but several times a day**

Every day we can choose to be kind or to be mean—to give of ourselves or to be selfish—every day we can choose to obey God or to disobey God (and again, that’s not usually just once a day—many opportunities to obey or not obey)

 And what our Catholic Faith tells us—**is that it all matters///**

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The 3rd thing that happened this week was we had our marriage retreat yesterday---there were some wonderful talks and great witnesses

As Catholics we believe marriage is a sacrament—and it’s a sacrament because the love of a husband and wife is meant to point us to the mutual love between Jesus and His Bride—the Church

And the most important thing we see about Jesus *is that He loves His Church*—*which means He loves you and me*—**even when we’re not perfect**

{Point to crucifix}-He loves us so much that He laid down His life for us

And our readings today explain that to us

Our 1st reading from the Book of Wisdom—Wisdom said today—talking about God--“ you overlook people's sins that they may repent. For you love all things that are… But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls,  for your imperishable spirit is in all things! Therefore **you rebuke offenders little by little**, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!”

So God doesn’t stop loving us when He sees our faults and sins and failings---*but He also doesn’t ignore them*—**He loves us enough** *to challenge us to improve*—to become better—to strive for the perfection He calls us to.

We see that in the gospel—Jesus calls Zacchaeus, *who’s a pretty big sinner---*and Zacchaeus, repents—he changes—how do we know that?

Because he says—“Lord I’ll give half of what I have away—if I’ve defrauded anyone I’ll pay them back fourfold”

Zacchaeus has a change of heart [not lip service] —*he truly repents*—after a life of sin he’s now striving toward the perfection God called Him too—my friends—*that’s the perfection God calls each and every one of us too*

Now many of you are called to strive for that perfection in the sacrament of Marriage—which isn’t easy—Marriage is really tough—because in marriage you’re called to love each other as Jesus loves you {Point to crucifix}

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Jesus loves us when we’re not perfect---but have you noticed we have a really hard time loving like that?

I said at the beginning that I feel the feast of All Saints in my grandmother’s feast—we called her “Nanny”---it’s her feast because she lived a life of great love and I’m sure she’s with the Lord in the glory of heaven

But I have to be honest—I feel that the feast of All Souls—when we pray for people who still need to reach perfection-for people who still have some of the wood, hay and straw of sin in their lives which we celebrated yesterday *is my parents feast day*—for now--why would I say that?

And please don’t get me wrong—I really loved my mom and dad—*even though they’re gone*—**I still love my mom and dad** [Miss them]

But I told people for years that I think my parents really love each other—*they just hide it really well*

And in “hiding their love”—that included some of the wood hay and straw that Paul tells us not to build with

I’m convinced that about 48 years before my parents died—my mom made up her mind that she wasn’t going to be happy until dad quite smoking---and dad never quite smoking {demonstrate with fist punching each other}—there was conflict—*unending power struggle*

 It was hurtful to them—it was hurtful to their kids

Now I share this because my guess is there are husbands and wives here---who might also be involved in a power struggle

And while they might not articulate it in this way—they have the attitude , “*until he changes that*—**I’m going to make him miserable**”---or “*until she stops that* **I’m not going to anything she wants me to do”** {fists}

Folks—that stubbornness—that engaging in power struggles—that refusal to fully love when you see your spouse’s failings---*is really foolish*

It’s not fully living your vows---and it gets in the way of you being who Jesus made you to be---*Jesus made you to love as He loves*

He loves us when we’re not perfect—He loves us with our imperfections—He loves us when we fail

And as we saw in our 1st reading—He **gently** nudges us toward perfection—//He doesn’t usually club us over the head with our failings---- as we saw in our gospel--- *when Jesus reached out with love to Zacchaeus*—**that love changed his life**

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My friends—our feasts this week remind us powerfully that our lives really matter

 At the end of this life we’re going to go to heaven—or purgatory—or hell

 And where we go depends on how well we imitate the love of Jesus

Jesus was obedient unto death—*we need to obey God’s commands*

Jesus loved people despite their faults and invited them to growth—we need to love others despite their failings and with love invite them to growth

Jesus sacrificed out of love for others—we need to sacrifice out of love for others

My friends- our obedience—our love—our willingness to sacrifice for others ---in so many ways will determine whether we’re worthy of heaven—how much purification we’ll need in purgatory (which has an element of time—so how much time we’ll spend in purgatory) – whether or not we really want to be with God forever

My friends—let’s really recognize that our lives matter—our choices matter—the way we obey God and treat others really matters