

Quinquagesima Sunday – 2020

Man's Natural Environment

Joyful Sorrow

Holy Mother Church bids us this season to fast & do penance, afflict ourselves, to meditate on the Passion of Our Lord. This is a sorrowful season, and it is designed to make us.... happy. NOT sorrowful! Strange, but true. How so?

Our Environment

Lent is all about returning us to our natural habitat. Every animal created by God has a natural environment. Birds in the air, fishes in the sea, animals in the woods, etc. We say animals are 'happy' they are in those places suited to their nature. A 'fish out of water' is not a happy fish. Birds with a broken wing, aren't happy birds. So it is with mankind, one of God's creatures too. We have a natural environment, outside of which we will not be happy.

Where in the World...

So, what is that environment? Where man is truly going to thrive, as a creature of God? Where on Earth are we going to find the perfect place for man?

Interior Environment

In an environment of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. In a place of courage, humility, piety, wisdom and so on. In other words, inside each individual soul! The perfect environment for man is Virtue, which is not found on the outside of man, but on the inside! This is the environment God created us for. When a human being possesses virtue, he is a happy human being! It doesn't matter what his external environment is like- as long as his internal environment is virtuous, he will be happy anywhere.

Not Like The Others

Mankind is an animal like no other. Yes, we share a body in common with the other animals. They have senses, and need nutrition, and care, and so do we. But mankind possess a rational soul, , which the other animals do not have, and this makes all the difference in the world! The only environment a non-rational animal needs to be happy, is one that provides for it's physical necessities. But mankind, on the other hand, has not only exterior environmental needs, but also interior. And as the soul is greater and more important than the body, so the environment of the soul is of greater importance than the environment of the body.

Everything is Amazing and...

Someone wrote an article about 10 years ago called "*Everything's amazing, and nobody's happy*". It was quite an interesting and perceptive essay, about how even though with all of the advances in modern technology, making everything in life faster and better, more convenient and less expensive, there is not a correlating increase in happiness. Comfort is so much easier to obtain now than before! Entertainment and enjoyment are so much easier to be had! And yet – people seem even more impatient and restless than ever. Why?

Bad Environment

Ultimately, it is because people are living in a bad environment- a bad interior environment, one of impatience, greed, laziness and so on. People lack *virtue*. People are unhappy because they can't control their emotions, they cannot control their impatience, their jealousy, their greed for more and more. It doesn't matter what our **external** environment is like, if our **internal** environment is bad, the best things in life will not make us happy- there will always be something to make us impatient, something to make us angry, something to make us feel jealous, whatever it may be. THAT is the true source of unhappiness, our internal environment. But on the contrary, for those people who do

possess virtue, for those who possess discipline, maturity, self-control, kindness and so on- they will find happiness and peace everywhere, no matter what they lack exteriorly.

External Possessions, Internal Emptiness.

Let's go to that environment where people possess everything that the World says you need in order to be happy. Let's go to that place where people have million dollar bank accounts, fame and fortune, physical beauty, all the best food and drink... let's go to Hollywood. And what do we see? Things seem to be going just great for these hollywood stars... and then they blow their brains out. Why? They had everything the world said they needed to be happy! Because the world is wrong. If we're not living in a good *interior* environment, nothing in the *exterior* environment will compensate! No matter how comfortable we are, no matter how many possessions we have, no matter how good I feel on the outside... if I'm empty on the inside, everything's empty.

Made for God

We're made for God, and we're made for virtue. We can throw all the money and all the possessions in the world into our soul, and they will never fill it. People trying to be happy with physical possessions is like a fish trying to be happy in an aquarium with all the best equipment, and no water. We have the best aquarium, the perfect fish food, all these cute little coral things... and there's just one problem. There's no WATER. That fish is going to die! Like a bird trying to be happy with two broken wings. We weren't made for that. We were made to FLY. Let's heal our broken wings, and THEN we'll be happy!

Lent is About the Environment

This is why Lent is designed to make us happy, because it is about restoring us to our natural interior environment. The environment of goodness, wisdom, peace, patience, and all the other virtues.

God Saw That it Was Good

In the beginning, what God created was *good*. Just like God put wings on birds so they could fly, and gills on fishes so they could swim, God put virtue in mankind, so that he could be good. In God's plan, we were supposed to find enjoyment and satisfaction in being virtuous. Courage and temperance and self-sacrifice, and generosity, all these virtuous would have felt *great!* We were supposed to have been, naturally and easily, perfectly good! No difficulty at all!

Original Sin

But Adam and Eve, by Original Sin, rebelled against God's order and ruined that perfect balance. God gave man an intellect to know the Truth and a Will to choose the good, and Adam and Eve took these priceless gifts God had given them and completely misused them. And we all have inherited that brokenness. That's where the tendency towards evil comes from, which we must fight against.

Fish out of Water

And so now all of us are born like fish out of water, or birds with broken wings. The virtues that were supposed to be natural and easy to us are now difficult to acquire, while on the contrary, all of those disorders that we were supposed to be naturally repulsive, like greed and selfishness and lust, now seem attractive. Anytime we choose sin, anytime we choose to indulge a disordered pleasure, is like stepping on our broken wing and making it worse.

Restoring the Order

Lent on the other hand, by encouraging us to acts of penance, fasting and prayer, is helping restore to us to the internal conditions that were supposed to be there from the beginning. Generosity, unselfishness, kindness, diligence. These qualities can be hard to acquire at first, but if we realize

that this was supposed to be our original condition, and that once we have them we will be happy, it is much easier! When we finally begin to possess the virtues, we will be like birds that have finally learned how to fly.

Satisfaction vs. Happiness

But one of the greatest calamities of Original Sin is that now, in the fallen condition we are in, we suppose that a person cannot be both virtuous and happy at the same time! This is so because we mistake the *feelings* of satisfaction and indulgence for the *condition* of happiness!

Me Me Me

There is a seemingly natural idea that if we want something really really bad, and we get it, then we'll be happy! But experience shows that this is not the case. We all know someone (and maybe that person is us!) who goes through life always trying to get his way. I fight with my spouse, I fight with my parents, I fight with whoever, in order to get my way. I want them to sacrifice for me and not the other way around. And I get my way! And I feel satisfied, and I feel happy. And this selfishness, this indulgence, happens day after day, week after week, year after year... and what do we find, after all those occasions of me getting my way? I am totally depressed. I'm not happy. Even though all along the way, I *felt* happy, I felt great! I was getting my way time after time, and I thought I was making myself happy... but in reality, I was breaking myself, more and more.

Satisfaction vs. Happiness

This all makes sense, and we know this, and yet still, we still spend all our time and energy trying to *feel* good instead of trying to *be* good. Once again, the purpose of Lent- which encourages us to *feel* dissatisfied right now, so that I can *be* happy later on.

God and Neighbor

Now let's think about those people who fight against their disordered desires. Those who sacrifice themselves for others every day, and they seek to do what is what is pleasing to others, not to themselves, and they work at virtue and they say their daily prayers and they want to be good and they struggle against their vices and their intentions. This isn't because they're timid, or stuck and have no other choice, they're really trying. And they're really looking for wisdom in suffering, and they make all those sacrifices willingly. It might be difficult in the moment, day after day, but because they have the right attitude, it's not so hard. And at the end of several years, they're happier than they were before! Sometimes their whole lives changed because they decided to change their internal environment. If I possess patience, nothing on the outside will affect me. If I desire goodness, nobody else's evil is going to bother me. The virtuous person is always happy because he carries happiness around with him!

Change Our Perspective

We have this idea that virtue is a distasteful thing, something that we have to do, but don't really want to. It's just always going to be irritating, and there's no way that I could ever be happy without entertainment, or my frappacino, or my iPhone, or whatever. There is no way I could ever be happy always setting aside one hour, every single day, for prayer. Prayer is **boring!** I don't like to pray! But this is false! With God's help, we can learn to enjoy difficult things. We actually can learn to appreciate and even enjoy- daily prayer, self-sacrifice, generosity, hard work, responsibility. God wants me to be healed, and part of that healing process is learning how to taste the sweetness of what seems bitter at first.

Grow Up

St. Paul tells us in today's epistle to grow up & stop acting like spoiled children. When I was a child, I thought like a child, I acted like a child, I spoke like a child. But when I became a man, I put childish things away. And what do children want? What do they do, what do they think about? They

think about themselves! They think about their taste buds, about fun, about trivial pleasures and fun. That's natural to children, we expect that from them... but how many of us never really change? We mature in body, but not really in soul. We don't desire candy or soda pop anymore... now it's alcohol and tobacco. I'm still childish in my desires, I just have more mature vices. That's what changes for many people and nothing else. St. Paul's says GROW UP. Stop thinking about yourself, and think about others. Stop desiring what is pleasurable, and start desiring what is good. That's the way to find happiness!

Lent Resolutions:

And so we can make a resolution right now, to grow up, to give up my childish attitudes. Instead of blaming other people for my problems, I'm going to look at myself, and my lack of virtue. Instead of telling others what's wrong with them, I'm going to change myself. What am I going to do this Lent? I'm going to say my daily prayers. I'm going to be well-mannered, well-groomed, well-spoken. I'm going to be diligent, disciplined, hard-working, honest and fair. I'm going to say my daily prayers. I'm going to be punctual. I'm going to be respectful of others' time, property, and reputation. I'm going to say my daily prayers. I'm going to be responsible, generous, and prudent; honest, tactful and considerate. I'm going to say my daily prayers. I'm going to be willing to make sacrifices, to be proactive. I'm not going to complain or wallow in self-pity. I'm going to make some changes. I'm going to say. My. Daily. Prayers. !

Lent is about making us happy.

Let us ask God every day this Lent to heal our perspective. Help me to see that my disordered desires, those things that satisfy me and bring me pleasure, are not the same things that will bring me happiness. Help me to turn things around, and see that my prayers, my sacrifices, my selflessness are what will bring me happiness and peace. Help me to understand my patient endurance of difficulty, my generous sacrifice for others, are the very things bringing health and healing to my soul. Virtue is the binding oil on the broken wings of my soul, virtue is what restores me to the natural condition, the natural environment, that God intended me to have from the very beginning. +