

6th Sunday of Easter, 5 May 2024

Homily

In life, there are two realities that most people need in order to navigate their way through the world: an interior sense of purpose and the need to belong to a wider group. These two basic elements help form our identity, and both drive and support us throughout our life.

In the ancient world, as well as today, belonging to a clan or tribe or gang or neighborhood or city is what gives people their sense of identity.

Very often enough, some code of honor, or mode of behaving according to their status, gives them their interior motivation.

In the play *Ajax*, by the ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles, we see what happens when someone is deprived of these two elements.

Sophocles paints a deliberately bleak view of the imagined Greek warrior society that Ajax belongs to. Without genuine divine help, human beings can easily end up being estranged from themselves and from others.

If all that drives us is consumerism, and we are only valued by our peers according to our possessions and our accumulation of capital, then, when these things disappear, so, in a sense, do we.

In the Gospels, Jesus assures us that we are more than any earthly group can make us, and we are interiorly led by more than any human sense of honor.

Through the giving of the Spirit, we become dwelling places of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching of Christ on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is absolutely central to the New Testament. It is taken up by the apostles: as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Didn't you realize that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you?" And again, St. Paul says that God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Spirit. This living of the Holy Spirit within us: gives us direction, makes us beautiful in God's eyes, and makes us part of the wider body of the Church. It is also vital to remember that the indwelling of the Spirit does not make us puppets, or short-circuit our free will. Rather, it creates our freedom, helps us to act in a more human way, a graced human way, than we would otherwise.

Being open, and allowing the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, has certain requirements. The first is to set aside some time to spend with God in prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who prompts us to pray in the first place, and if we respond then we can become sources of living prayer. It is, of course, basic to understanding prayer that, on the one level, we do not know how to do it. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit itself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words". Not only do we raise our minds to God, but our hearts become aware of God's presence within us and in the Church.

Secondly, living together with friends requires communication. We need both to speak and to listen. The time we spend in prayer helps us reveal our joys and sorrows, our hopes for this world and our desire for eternity.

Finally, we might think of St. Teresa of Avila's own definition of prayer. "Prayer", she writes, "is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with God, the one who we know through faith truly loves us".

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