



EYESIGHT TO THE BLIND

Readings for this Sunday:
1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13;
Psalm 23:1-6;
Ephesians 5:8-14;
John 9:1-41

God's ways of seeing are not our ways, we hear in today's First Reading. Jesus illustrates this in the Gospel - as the blind man comes to see and the Pharisees are made blind.

The blind man stands for all humanity. "Born totally in sin" he is made a new creation by the saving power of Christ.

As God fashioned the first man from the clay of the earth (see Genesis 2:7), Jesus gives the blind man new life by anointing his eyes with clay (see John 9:11). As God breathed the spirit of life into the first man, the blind man is not healed until he washes in the waters of Siloam, a name that means "Sent."

Jesus is the One "sent" by the Father to do the Father's will (see John 9:4; 12:44). He is the new source of life-giving water - the Holy Spirit who rushes upon us in Baptism (see John 4:10; 7:38-39).

This is the Spirit that rushes upon God's chosen king David in today's First Reading. A shepherd like Moses before him (see Exodus 3:1; Psalm 78:70-71), David is also a sign pointing to the good shepherd and king to come - Jesus (see John 10:11).

The Lord is our shepherd, as we sing in today's Psalm. By his death and Resurrection He has made a path for us through the dark valley of sin and death, leading us to the verdant pastures of the kingdom of life, the Church.

In the restful waters of Baptism He has refreshed our souls. He has anointed our heads with the oil of Confirmation and spread the Eucharistic table before us, filling our cups to overflowing.

With the once-blind man we enter His house to give God the praise, to renew our vow: "I do believe, Lord."

"The Lord looks into the heart," we hear today. Let Him find us, as Paul advises in today's Epistle, living as "children of light" - trying always to learn what is pleasing to our Father.

Yours in Christ,
Scott Hahn, Ph.D.

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HUMILITY

By Dan Burke

*O Jesus, You who were so humiliated for us,
teach me how to practice true humility.*

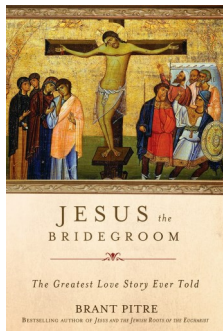


MEDITATION

Charity is the essence of Christian perfection, for charity alone has the power to unite man to God, his last end. But for us poor, miserable creatures, whom God wishes to raise to union with Himself, is charity the ultimate basis of the spiritual life? No. There is something deeper still which is, so to speak, the basis of charity, and that is humility. Humility is to charity what the foundation is to a building. Digging the foundation is not building the house, yet it is the preliminary, indispensable work, the condition sine qua non. The deeper, and firmer it is, the better the house will be and the greater assurance of stability it will have. Only the fool "built his house upon the sand," with the inevitable consequence of seeing it crumble away very soon. The wise man, on the contrary, "built ... upon a rock" (Mt 7:24-26); storms and winds might threaten, but his house was unshakable because its foundation was solid.

Humility is the firm bedrock upon which every Christian should build the edifice of his spiritual life. "If you wish to lay good foundations," says St. Teresa of Jesus to her daughters, "each of you must try to be the least of all" that is, you must practice humility. "If you do that ... your foundation will be so firmly laid that your Castle will not fall" (cf. Interior Castle [Mansions] VII, 4). Humility forms the foundation of charity by emptying the soul of pride, arrogance, disordered love of self and of one's own excellence, and by replacing them with the love of God and our neighbor.

The more humility empties the soul of the vain, proud pretenses of self, the more room there will be for God. "When at last [the spiritual man] comes to be reduced to nothing, which will be the greatest extreme of humility, spiritual union will be wrought between the soul and God" (St. John of the Cross, Ascent of Mt. Carmel, II, 7, 11).



Have you ever wondered? Why do Catholics fast on Good Friday? Moreover, why is it traditional to fast on the Fridays of Lent?

There are, of course, various historical and liturgical reasons for the custom of fasting. But there's also a biblical foundation for fasting on Fridays that's directly tied to the topic of my new book, *Jesus the Bridegroom: the Greatest Love Story Ever Told*. The connection really hit me when I went to Mass last Friday with my wife and children.

Jesus the Bridegroom and the First Friday in Lent

Sitting there on the front pew (because that's the best seat if you have young children!), we were, like many other young families at the beginning of Lent, somewhat tired and distracted at the end of a long week. I for one was starting to get anxious about the flurry of speaking engagements and interviews that were coming up to promote the book, and also thinking hard about how to help people see why the topic was not just fascinating but spiritually relevant to their lives. And then, much to my surprise, when it came time to stand for the Friday Gospel, I heard these words:

The disciples of John approached Jesus and said, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the Bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." (Matthew 9:14-15)

As I heard these words, a big smile spread across my face. Any worries I may have had about the importance of the topic of the new book melted away. My twelve-year old daughter reached over and tugged my arm, smiling and pointing up to the Gospel! (She knew my book was on Jesus the Bridegroom.) At that moment, I realized for the first time: Every year, on the very first Friday of Lent, the Church proclaims Jesus' riddle about the Bridegroom and the Wedding Guests. Why?

For one thing, it's because this is one of Jesus' first allusions to his coming passion and death. You can see this by realizing that Jesus' mysterious response is really a parable, in which he makes three key comparisons.

Jesus' Riddle about the Sons of the Bride chamber

First, Jesus implicitly identifies himself as "the bridegroom" in order to suggest that the present, while he and his disciples are together, are like an ancient Jewish wedding feast: it's a time for celebration, not for fasting.

Second, he compares his disciples to the wedding guests--or, more literally, the "sons of the bride chamber" (Greek *huioi tou nymphonos*). These were basically the ancient Jewish equivalent of 'groomsmen', who--in ancient as well as modern times!--weren't exactly known for fasting. Indeed, in rabbinic tradition, both the bridegroom and the sons of the bride chamber were not obligated to perform ordinary religious duties during the seven-day Jewish wedding, including fasting.

Third and finally--and most importantly for us--Jesus is also implicitly identifying the day of his passion and death as his wedding day. He does this by speaking about the coming

time "when the bridegroom is taken away from them" and how they will fast on that day (cf. Mark 2:20).

The Jewish Bride chamber and Jesus' 'Wedding Day'

On one level this is a reference to the ancient Jewish night of consummation, when the bridegroom would leave his family and friends and enter into the "bride chamber" (Hebrew *huppah*) in order to be united to his bride, not to come out again until morning (see Psalm 19:4-5; Tobit 6:15-17). On a deeper level, the day that Jesus the Bridegroom is "taken away" is of course the day of his passion and death. As New Testament scholar Craig Keener puts it: "Jesus is the groom of God's people in the coming messianic banquet... The 'taking' of the bridegroom, of course, is a veiled reference to the impending crucifixion." (Keener, Matthew, p. 300). In other words, Jesus' 'wedding day' is the day of his death. (And this isn't just a pretty metaphor. As I show in the chapter on the Crucifixion in the book, there are several striking parallels between Jesus' crucifixion and an ancient Jewish wedding day.)

Remembering the Day our Bridegroom was "Taken Away"

What does any of this have to do with fasting on Fridays in Lent, and on Good Friday above all? From a biblical perspective: the reason we fast is because Friday is the day our Bridegroom was 'taken away' from us, and we don't ever want to forget it. In fulfillment of Jesus' words--"then they will fast"--we deny ourselves and remember the passion of the Bridegroom God of Israel, who loved us so much that he not only became man, but mounted the wood of the cross in order to save humanity from sin and be united to us in love. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

"In [Jesus] in an unexpected way, God and man become one, become a 'marriage', though this marriage--as Jesus subsequently points out--passes through the Cross, through the 'taking away' of the bridegroom. (Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 1, p. 252)

From this perspective, our Friday fasting and penances should not just be acts of self-denial, but sacrifices given out of love, just as the Bridegroom Messiah sacrificed himself out of love for us. We fast in memory of the one who 'loved us and gave himself for us' (cf. Galatians 2:20).

The Divine Love Story

Although many a man throughout history has compared his wedding day to his funeral; Jesus of Nazareth is the only man who ever compared his funeral to his wedding day. That is because he was no ordinary man; he was the Bridegroom God of Israel come in the flesh in to save his Bride. And his life and death on the Cross were nothing less than the center of the divine love story that is the real meaning of human history. Why else does the Bible begin with the wedding of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3) and end with the Wedding of Christ in the Church in the Book of Revelation (Rev 19-22)?!

On every Friday during Lent--especially Good Friday--may his disciples remember his words about the passion--"they will fast on that day." In this way, we will truly prepare ourselves for the great Feast of Easter, when we will celebrate the Resurrection of the Bridegroom who gives himself to his Bride in every Eucharist as a foretaste of heaven--of the eternal "Wedding Supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7).

Have a blessed Lent!

PRAYER

FASTING

ALMS GIVING

CONFESSION

IT'S NOT TOO LATE
EASTER IS APRIL 20, 2014