

HOMILY 31st SUNDAY – B
“Living Tee Pee Spirituality”
(Dt 6:2-6; Psalm 18; Heb 7:23-28; Mk 12:28-34)

What did the mother hen say to another hen when she saw her first plate of scrambled eggs? The answer is: “Look at all those mixed up kids!”

How can one draw near to the Kingdom of God? The following statement provides one answer:

Live Tee Pee Spirituality as a way to fulfill the Great Commandment

The gospel today is a very unusual inter-change between a scribe and Jesus that deserves closer scrutiny. The scribe’s question, and his response to the answer Jesus gives, earns him the astonishing comment from Jesus: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” The scribe recognized Jesus as a great Teacher, and Jesus recognizes the scribe as a pilgrim moving towards the kingdom. How can we, like the scribe, draw near to the Kingdom of God?

The answer to how to draw near to the Kingdom of God is clear in all three readings: we must put God first in our lives, love God back and love others as we love ourselves. Basically, that is keeping the Great Commandment of Jesus: Love God, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. That is easy to say, but how does one do it?

A way that I find very helpful is what I call Tee Pee Spirituality. Erecting a tee pee always starts with three poles tied together, a tripod that will stand on its own. It is the same with our spiritual life – we need a spiritual tripod on which we can build a Christian life.

The three poles are *faith, fellowship and self-awareness*. Neither pole can stand on its own. All three are needed to live a genuine Christian life, to stand strong before the obstacles and temptations that our world puts in our way.

The first pole is *faith*. We believe in a God who is love, mercy, compassion and forgiveness – who loves us unconditionally. We must love God back with our whole being. We must make our relationship with God THE priority in our life. We do that through prayer and worship. We love God by pondering God’s Word, praying alone and with others, and especially by praising and worshipping God as His Church, the Body of Christ. This is of utmost importance.

But prayer alone is not enough – we also need *fellowship*. We can hide behind devotions, avoid our daily responsibilities by seeking the sensational, and even become addicted to religion. We need fellowship, other people in our lives to help us stay balanced. Each of us needs a soul mate, someone we can trust completely, someone who will help us to see our blind spots, someone who will both support us and challenge us. We need groups to

which we can belong, groups that will rub off our rough edges and help us be human. We need people whom we can love, and who will love us back.

But prayer and fellowship together are not enough. We need a third pole called *self-awareness*. We are commanded not just to love God and others, but to do so as we love ourselves. How can we love someone we do not know? This is a challenge for many people. Many of us struggle to like ourselves, to believe in ourselves. We are afraid that if others really get to know us, they won't like who we are, and so we keep running away from ourselves. A sign of this is when we reject compliments. To love ourselves we have to know ourselves. As retreat master Richard Rohr put it, "You are who you are – what are you afraid of?"

This is perhaps the area we have to work on the most. To make the inner journey into ourselves is our greatest challenge. The glory of God is man and woman fully alive, fully human. To be fully human, we need to know what we think, as well as name, acknowledge and feel our own feelings and emotions. We also must admit our wrongdoing, our sins and our mistakes, take responsibility for them and seek God's forgiveness. At an even deeper level, we must be able to name our character defects, our sinfulness, that which makes us sin, and present these to the Lord (and to others) for healing. And we must be comfortable with our personal qualities, and grateful for them.

To live out this Tee Pee spirituality is to fulfill the Great Commandment that Jesus gave us: love God (faith); love our neighbour (fellowship) as we love ourselves (self-awareness).

Those who belong to the 12 Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous are fortunate. The 12 Steps they are called to live have the Great Commandment and Tee Pee Spirituality built right into them. Four of the Steps are all about loving God (faith); four of the Steps are all about loving others (fellowship), and four of the Steps are all about loving ourselves (self-awareness). To work this program well is to walk in balance, harmony and wellness. It is to fulfill the Great Commandment, and to live Tee Pee spirituality.

The Eucharist we celebrate today is itself a fulfillment of the Great Command and a living out of Tee Pee spirituality. We come to love God back, to hear his Word and receive Jesus in communion; we come to love each other, gathered together as community, exchanging the peace of Christ, and we come out of love for ourselves, aware of our need for forgiveness (the penitential rite) and healing ("Speak but the word and my soul will be healed").

So let us go forth from this celebration to draw near to the Kingdom of God by living out Tee Pee spirituality. Let us go forth to be fully human by loving God back, and loving our neighbour as we love ourselves.