

HOMILY SUNDAY 22-B (HOMILY 03)

“First Fruits of all Creation”

(Dt 4:1-2, 6-8; Ps 15; James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27; Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23)

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Some years back, two Dominican sisters serving in our archdiocese realized their dream of serving in a mission. There was much excitement as they packed up and prepared to move to Pine House as lay formators over there.

In the second reading today, we see St. Paul inviting us to set out on a new venture. In his words, God gave us birth by the Word of Truth, so that we would be the first fruits of God’s creation.

It is a venture into being the first fruits of a new creation. We are invited to be part of a new creation by believing in Jesus and living his law of love

That new venture is rooted in the experience of the Israelites in the desert after their escape from slavery in Egypt. At Mt. Sinai, through Moses, they are given the Decalogue, the Law, the Ten Commandments and become a new people of the covenant with a mandate to live a new way of life as the People of God, the Chosen ones.

Unfortunately, they fell prey to the all too common temptations that Jesus faced in the desert – to put their faith in possessions, prestige and the selfish use of power. Throughout their history, they craved for and grasped at obtaining Land, King and Temple so that they could be like the other nations. These are not bad things in themselves. The problem is that these became the means by which they started to measure what they thought was their holiness. Their notion of religion turned the Law into human traditions and legalism exhibited especially by the scribes and Pharisees and how they carried out their faith in God. As Jesus put it so succinctly, “their hearts are far from me, and they teach human traditions as doctrines.”

It is easy for us to slip into reliance on rules and regulations that have actually slipped away from their original intent, and lost the spirit by which they were made. In 1975, the Oblates had an old rule that a member of the order could not go overseas until that person had served 25 years in ministry. That rule was pulled out by the Provincial and council to prevent a newly ordained priest from going on a tour of the Holy Land, even though he had nothing to do until he had received his obedience, and his parents were going to pay for the trip. What a splendid opportunity that would have been for a newly ordained priest to complete his preparation for a life time of ministry by going to the Holy Land – all prevented by a rule that no longer served its original purpose, for now international flights were less expensive than flights within the country. To this day, that priest has still not made it to the Holy Land.

Jesus invites us to go beyond rules and regulations to be part of a new creation based on spirit and love. This happens through forgiveness of our sins (fornication, theft, murder, adultery, slander) and healing of our defects of character (avarice, wickedness, deceit,

licentiousness, envy, pride, folly). This new way of life is based on both forgiveness and healing.

In the second reading, St. Paul continues to describe real religion as genuine compassion and charity, as well as personal holiness and healing.

Reinhold Niebuhr, Lutheran theologian who conceived the Serenity Prayer, has this to say about this new creation:

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime, therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing that is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history, therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we can do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone, therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is as virtuous from the standpoint of our friends or foes as it is from our standpoint, therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.”

The Eucharist we celebrate today is the heart of our Sacred Tradition that helps transform us into the Body of Christ and empowers us to live the commandment to love the world.

So let us put our faith in Jesus, live his law of love, and we will be part of his new creation.