

Sunday Homily

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

14 MARCH 2021

YEAR B

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

John 3:16

Illustration

"The cat has brought in another mouse!" How many of us have heard that familiar refrain? And there it is, a small grey bundle of fear tucked trembling behind the cooker while the sleek, black cat prowls around and licks its lips in anticipation. Your kids cluster round, shooing the cat away, eyes wide with concern and pleading with you to save the mouse. "Okay," you say, "we'll catch it and put it back outside where it belongs." And then there follows a good ten minutes of planning to find a way of safely removing the terrified mouse. "Okay mouse," you say hopefully, "just you sit quietly and we'll get you back outside," and carefully, oh so carefully, you try and catch it in your hands. But, of course, the mouse isn't having any of this. He is just as distrustful of us as he is of the cat. Then, as the effort becomes greater and you wonder if the trouble is really worth it, your eyes turn heavenwards and you ask yourself why the stupid mouse won't let you help it.

Gospel Teaching

We can be like that mouse when God in his goodness and compassion tries to save us. Sometimes we seem to have the idea that God is out to get us – that he is the Judge, the one waiting to trip us up if we go wrong, the one who sees all our dark and secret sins which we would rather no one knew about. But if we are anxious it is because we are letting our false notions of God take over – we are forgetting the Gospel. God does see all we do, but his response is not to condemn us. He sees sin for what it is, the damaging and wounding force that causes us so much misery and distress. God's response to our sin is to look on us with great tenderness and compassion. Jesus did not come to damn us, but to free us, to liberate us from all that makes us less than what we really are, from everything that makes us less human, less loving.

This is why the Gospel today asks the exasperated question: Why on earth do people continually resist God's efforts to save the world when he is only trying to help? "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

That seems the hardest thing in the world for us to believe. And we so-called religious people seem to find it just as hard to accept that God really does not condemn us. He wants to rescue us. He offers us love.

But people clearly do resist the love of God. We still watch the news broadcasts full of war and greed and violence, of rich and poor, the well-fed and the hungry. We are still unable to do very much in the face of the rising tide of poverty at home and abroad. We still hurt our children, our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters. We still lash out at our friends and bully and torment those we don't like. We can look into our own hearts and see that there is a mixture of good and bad within us. All of us live ambiguous lives, sometimes living the life of God and sometimes destroying the vision that we are trying so hard to build. We are still in need of the healing grace of God if we are to fulfil our purpose.

Application

It does seem a hopelessly difficult task. In fact, if we depended solely on our own efforts it would be impossible and we might as well give up right away. But thank God it is not by our own efforts that we can start to live the life of the kingdom of God. God reaches in to pluck us out of our sin and fills us with his grace so that we are transformed. He takes away our sin and gives us his own life. He encourages us to nourish that life with word and sacrament. All we need to do is accept it and allow ourselves to change as we grow.

Giving ourselves up to the love of God can appear to be a frightening process. But if we can only let go of our fears and trust him, then we will not be disappointed. God is truth and his truth sets us free.