

Novena of Grace Day 5 Homily

7 March 2018

Dt. 4:1, 5-9

Mt. 5:17-19

Have any of you ever had the experience of when a young child, perhaps your daughter or son, a niece or nephew, or maybe a younger sister or brother, innocently asks you a question that has a relatively simple answer and you think to yourself, “Well, that was easy. Job well done.” But then there is a follow-up question. And another follow-up question. And another. And another. Suddenly you realize that the innocent simple question was really an entrance to a never-ending rabbit hole with no wonderland in sight. And all these follow-up questions that occur one after another after another, are not different questions, but rather the same question. The ever provocative “But Why?” The simple and innocent moment of intrigue brought forth from a young mind budding with curiosity becomes a marathon in which your mental faculties are fatigued, your intellectual knowledge exhausted, and you are left asking yourself, “Good Lord, Why?!” There is only one way to end this out-of-control spiraling into the abyss of whys. You look at them, and with great confidence you say, “I don’t know.”

The question “why” though perhaps a bit annoying when used constantly, is an important question, particularly when asked by a young child who is taking an interest in the world. The question why opens the door to answers about our world, how it works, and how it can possibly be better. The question why invites answers about who we are, as a people, where do we come from, and where is it that we are going, which are profound and fundamental existential questions that encourage us to probe more deeply into what it means to be human, what is the nature of God, as well as the nature of our relationship with God. And sometimes, our why has an answer that is crystal clear, apparent as the sun in the sky, and that satisfies our curiosity. And sometimes, one why leads to another why, and another why, and another why until finally, it leads to an “I don’t know.” But we never fully stop asking, stop pondering, stop wondering “why,” particularly when matters are

important, because behind the question “why” sometime lies the purpose that motivates our actions, making us the person we are or the person we want to be.

Why did Moses, the lawgiver who brought to the people the commandments from God, encourage them to observe them carefully? Because, not only will it ensure that they are a wise people adhering to a covenant that makes them one, united to each other and to God, but also because Moses will not be with them always. The time will come when he must depart and they must continue on into the promise land without him. Moses will not always be with them, to guide them, but they have the law and what they have witnessed. And so, he instructs them to remember. To make a strong memory of all that has happened, all they have witnessed, all they have been taught so that they can be guided by God and teach all they have learned to their children who no doubt will ask why they do what they do.

Like Moses, Jesus is a lawgiver. He assures the people that he is not here to abolish the law, but rather he wants to show how the law can be life-giving. Several verses before the passage we heard today, Jesus tells the people, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Jesus, up on the mount, delivers to the people the beatitudes. A new way of seeing the law that seeks to love God entirely and to love another. It is a new way of understanding the law not as a series of “shall not” restrictions, but rather open invitations to be compassionate, merciful, forgiving, and loving. And why would we want to answer such invitations? Why should we be compassionate, merciful, forgiving and loving? Because those who answer with compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and love, those people are truly blessed.

Why have you come here to the novena? Why do you continue to come? Maybe you know exactly why you have come to the novena, or maybe you discovered your answer throughout these past five days. Perhaps it was an opportunity to gather as a community and offer up your prayers with others with one united voice. Perhaps it was to seek forgiveness and healing from God’s loving embrace. Perhaps it was a desire to know more fully how God is working in our life, especially in those places where we feel broken and most vulnerable.

Perhaps it was the need to forgive and place aside resentments that have kept you from being your genuine loving self. Perhaps you came with a specific reason in mind, but have been surprised by God. Whatever your individual answers to why you came or continue to come to the novena might be, I think we can agree that in coming together and praying with one another, we all want to grow into being a more compassionate, forgiving, and loving person, who is not only blessed, but also a blessing to others. This is how we sow the seeds of peace. This is how we truly become children of God.