

## HOMILY ON THE ASCENSION SUNDAY

### WHEN THE LAST WHISTLE BLOWS

A man married four wives. He loved the fourth one more than the rest, then the second and the third in that order. The first was the least loved. The man later fell critically ill and the doctors give up after lots of efforts to revive him. He was finally told that he was to die and he had to prepare for the *journey of no return* and part of the preparations was that he had to look for a companion for the journey. He accosted the fourth wife whom he loved most with the request: ‘would you accompany me to the next world so that we can continue our life there for the doctor has told me that I will die and I can’t afford to miss you for I love you so much?’ The fourth wife told him, ‘I love you too but not to the extent of following you to the land of the dead’ and walked away. He met the third wife and made the same request and, in response, the third wife also walked away telling him that although she loved him, they do not have the same destiny that she could remarry if he eventually dies. The last hope was second wife even though the hope was vague as the last two whom he lavished most of his care, love and wealth on had deserted him by turning down his request but he had to try. So he approached the second wife with the request: ‘would you accompany me to the next world so that we can continue our life there for the doctor has told me that I will die and I can’t afford to miss you for I love you so much?’ The second wife smiled and said, ‘I can help you but not dying with you definitely, I think the best I can do for you is to prepare to give a befitting burial. All hopes were lost because he never loved the first wife therefore he could not think of approaching her with such a request as that would be insulting himself. But the first wife, who though not loved, loved her husband dearly; she saw his predicaments and said to him, do not panic, I am ready to go with you to wherever you go even to the land of the dead and to be with you there. And the man with tears running down his cheeks, said, ‘if I had known that you are such a treasure, I should have loved you all my life.’

After His resurrection, Christ stayed forty days on earth organizing His apostle and disciples and preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. During this period, He kept appearing to them and confirming what He told them while He was still with them, that He would be handed over, be crucified, that He would die and that on the third day He would rise from the dead. After He had revealed to them what remained

to be made manifest as to strengthen their faith, it was time for Him to ascend to His Eternal Father.

According to St. Luke in the Acts of the apostle, on that last day before His ascension, Jesus and His apostles were together. Earlier before His passion, He had told them that although John baptized with water, very soon they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (predicting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost Day). The apostles being carnal and taking Christ for a political leader, began to ask Him whether it was time for Him to restore the kingdom to Israel. This was because they were already fed up with the ruler-ship of the gentiles (Rome), over the Israelites and thought that Christ was going to oust the Romans out and restore the Kingdom to the rightful people, Israel. Jesus did not answer the question direct rather He told them that they should concern themselves with their primary duties which were that of bearing witness to Him by spreading the gospel to the farthest end of the earth and not focusing on the understanding of mysteries which are the prerogatives of the Eternal Father.

He instructed them never to leave Jerusalem but should wait for the promised of the Father (the coming of Holy Spirit) which was the last of His prediction to come into fulfilment. He had earlier told them that when the Spirit come He would lead them to complete truth.

In the above story, the four wives represent: wealth, power, family tag and the soul. The soul is the first wife who was least loved if ever, the second wife is the family, the third is wealth and the last is the human soul.

Like the leading story, the apostles, in spite of the three years of rigorous training from the master Himself, were still very carnal. What mattered to them were the gratification of the flesh which material things like power, position and the likes bring. When the Lord tried to redirect their priority they would not understand nor pay attention to Him instead they would prefer to ask Him for the favou of one staying at His right and the other at His left when He eventually takes up power, as was case with James and John, the two sons of Zebedee.

The message of ascension constantly reminds us that one day we will would have to pay the ultimate price, death, and account of our stewardship would be required of us. Readiness for that glorious day will do us a great good as that would make us to approach the God confidently knowing that we had spent our life working Him and who, on His part, will never disappoint us.

St. Paul made a very important prayer over us in his letter to the Ephesians

*May the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you will see what hope His call holds for you, what rich glories He has promised the saints will inherit and how infinitely great is the power is the power that He has exercised for us believers, (Eph. 1:18 -19).*

The king in the story above lavished his love on the last three wives and rarely had any regard on the first because the eyes of his mind was close against the reality of things. So this prayer is necessary to us now that the Lord enlightens the eyes of our minds so that we will be able to see what hope is love holds for us. When St. Stephen was being killed by stoning, the eyes of his mind were opened and he saw the glory of the Lord and the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Father. Because of that he determined to die witnessing to the Truth.

Francisco Marto, one of the three seers (shepherds) of Fatima's minds were enlightened at such tender age that when he was asked what he would like be in future; although he liked every profession, all he could say was 'I want to die and go to heaven. It was the same with the other two, although Lucia, was stay here much longer to spread the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, she wanted to go with her other companions.

Earlier before St. Paul made this wonderful prayer, in today's reading, he admonished us to make effort to live a life worthy of our vocation, by been charitable to one another in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. It was after the admonition that he said the prayer mindful of the fact that if we are aware of what hope His call hold for us we would work with added effort and vigour aiming at the reward.

He was able to make such beautiful prayer because the eyes of his own mind had been open and he had seen what hope his call holds for him... hence he said 'I have fought the good fight, I have run the race to the finish, all I am waiting for is the crown of the eternal glory...' (2Tim. 4:7-8).

The message of the ascension calls us to a continuous witnessing to the Lord; spreading the message of God's love to every part of the world, welcome and unwelcome, in season and out of season. The onus lies on us to evangelize the whole world not only by preaching with the words of our mouth but witnessing with our lives even to the point of shedding our blood.

In order not to repeat the mistake of the king in the leading story, we should care more about the state of our souls than the comfort of the bodies because every material thing will leave us here or rather we shall leave them behind to answer the ultimate call when the final whistle is blown. At that time what counts will no longer be what amount of wealth, power, fame etc. you acquired but how well you affected positively the lives of others through your position and acquisitions.

Wise people use their wealth wisely to put themselves together and at the same time putting smiles in the faces of the less privileged ones. Wise people build connecting bridges not walls of separation.

As Christ was being taken up the apostles were watching almost in disappointment but the angel assured them that that same Christ whom they saw ascending would come back. In John's gospel Christ said that he was going to prepare a place for us and would come back to pick us after preparing the place for us. But big question begging for your candid answer is: Since it is as sure as the dawn that after preparing and making ready our places, Christ will definitely come for us, will he find us ready at the same time? If not what do you think will happen? Your answer is as good as mine.

**HAPPY ASCENSION.**