

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday per Annum - A  
Sirach 15:15-20;  
I Corinthians 2:6-10;  
Matthew 5:17-37  
Little Flower - 2/16/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's reading from First Corinthians, St. Paul wrote, "*What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him.*"<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Paul is obviously referring to heaven. When we are young, we do not think too much about heaven. A psychiatrist who advises the Tribunal once told me that during the first half of life, we are all busy acquiring life. It is only during the second half of life that we become more reflective.

In three audiences in July and August of 1999, Blessed Pope John Paul II talked about heaven, hell, and purgatory. In all three, he emphasized that they are not physical places but states of being. In his teaching on heaven, he said, "In the context of Revelation, we know that the 'heaven' or 'happiness' in which we will find ourselves is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity."<sup>1</sup>

As I have often said, Jesus' most frequent image for the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is a banquet. For the Jews of Jesus' time, meals were sacred times of intimacy with God and with others. This is why, for example, their primary worship was the weekly Sabbath supper and the annual Seder Supper. If the kingdom of heaven is a banquet, heaven, then, is intimacy with God and others. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it, "Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ' (n. 1026)."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, we often seek heaven on earth. St. Augustine, however, was correct when he wrote, "My heart will never rest until it rests in You, O Lord" [*Confessions*, I, 1]. Nothing and no one on earth can bring us complete happiness or fulfillment. For example, one of the mistakes young couples often make is to expect their partners to meet all their needs for communication, closeness, companionship, and love. This puts a tremendous burden on the other person and the relationship. They expect too much from each other and from their relationship. I once asked one of the best couples I know what makes a marriage successful. They listed five qualities, one of which was having realistic expectations of each other and of marriage. Likewise, some people seek their ultimate happiness and fulfillment in money and possessions, power or prestige, and/or pleasure.

At the same time, we need to understand that there is not a complete break between this life and the next. We anticipate heaven in at least two ways. Every Eucharist is an anticipation of the heavenly banquet. This is why it is so important that when we come to Mass, we actively participate in the Mass. Please remember that because of the unbreakable bond between the Communion of Saints in heaven and the Church on earth, we are never closer to our loved ones who have died than when we celebrate Eucharist.

Also, because God created us as persons capable of relating consciously in knowledge and love, we anticipate heaven in our relationships here on earth to the extent that they involve mutual self-revelation, self-giving, and self-sacrifice. I would suggest that it is often because of loving relationships that people who seem to have very little reason to be happy are happier than people who seem to have everything.

My brothers and sisters, in today's reading from Sirach, we are told that before us are life and death, good and evil. Whichever we choose will be given us. According to Sirach, if we choose, we can keep the commandments, and they will save us. However, in today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that we have to do more than keep the commandments. We have to strive to be the very best Christians and the very best people we can be.

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<sup>1</sup>Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Wednesday, 21 July 1999, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/audiences/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_21071999\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_21071999_en.html).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*