

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 2, 2015

“My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

Who Am I?

Each and every one of us began life in the exact same way, as have the 7.2 billion people currently alive and the same as the 100 billion who lived before us (except for one). We began with the meeting of an egg and spermatozoa, gestated inside of our mother’s womb for 9 months and were eventually born. After that, we were nurtured and cared for, educated to a greater or lesser degree, and lived in the world.

When we think about it, this is really no different from the way any other mammal begins life. Sure, the egg may develop outside of the mother, but effectively every single animal on the planet begins life in approximately the same way.

So... what makes us special? What makes us unique? First off, unlike any other species, homosapiens, or human beings, have the capacity for reasoned thought... for self-awareness. This is indicative of an ability for self-reflection and the possibility of an inner life that goes beyond a spider, dog or monkey. This capacity makes us unique as a species. It also gives us the capacity to make moral decisions... also known as the ability to exercise free will.

If we go all the way back to Genesis, we find out a few things:

- We were made in the image and likeness of God
- Adam was created as the first man, and Eve was created from his own flesh, from his side, as a complementary equal

- The first moral decision made by humankind separated us from the unique relationship we shared with God

This tells us quite a bit about where we come from in our history, and that we are prone, as a species, to make bad decisions. Thankfully, a loving God created us and did not leave us totally to our own devices. Throughout history, He has given us instructions on how to best live our lives so that we have the happiest, most free and best experience during our duration on earth. Unfortunately, His ways are not always the ways that we choose to go, and we take a different route.

So... the question before us today, “Who am I?” is one that is not always easy to answer. In fact, if we answer ourselves honestly, we will find that our answers can be somewhat contradictory. We may say, “I am made in God’s image and likeness, but I am an independent person.” Or we may say, “I believe in Christ, but I don’t always want to do what He teaches.” Of course, there are many and varied permutations on these, but we will definitely find that we do have this type of dualism within us.

When we get right down to it, who we are, truly, is defined by our conscience. Today, we hear much about ‘conscience,’ but what exactly is our conscience supposed to be, and more importantly, how should it be formed?

Our conscience is our navigator... our moral compass if you will. It is that which should properly direct our decisions and actions according to a moral basis. However in order to work properly, our conscience must be formed, or set up, properly. It is properly formed by feasting on ‘the bread of God’ that we hear about in

today's Gospel. Jesus came not to feed us with some great multi-grain bread or succulent bagel, but with God's knowledge and love... the knowledge and love that forms our conscience and our own human love, which is a reflection of God's love for us.

As a general notion, I think we know that this is true. However, how many of us have actually taken time and thought about what it takes to have a well-formed conscience? It is not as simple as we might think. Firstly, we have to know how to find out the fullness of the Truth that God has revealed to humankind through Christ. That comes through the Church, who was trusted with the complete deposit of faith revealed through the ages, and guarded by the Holy Spirit. In order to insure that our conscience is formed in the right way, we must first assume that everything the Church teaches is indeed the Truth. This is not to say that we cannot *question* things, but in order to have a starting point, we need a base, and the base is the teachings of the Church, revealed by God through Christ. When we have a question as to whether an individual teaching is right or not, if we begin with the assumption the Church is right, then the burden is on us to find the proof that she is wrong. If after true and legitimate research (by the way, research doesn't mean merely 'I just don't agree,' or 'it just doesn't feel right to me') we find that there is an error, then and only then can we disregard that teaching. For example, at one time the Church taught that the sun revolved around the earth. This was scientifically disproven, and the Church changed her teaching.

As we are forming our conscience, we also need to be mindful of the Virtues. Now, there are 2 different types of virtues: the Theological Virtues and the Moral Virtues. The Theological Virtues are: Faith, Hope and Love. The Moral Virtues are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Moderation. Now, I could spend hours discussing these in-depth... but I won't. I have a 200 page book on this alone. However, in a nutshell, I think we all have a general idea of what faith, hope, love, prudence, justice, fortitude and moderation are. These are things that we must keep in mind with every decision and action we make. If we choose against these, we will fall into their corresponding vices, which are unbelief, despair, hatred or indifference, imprudence or debauchery, injustice, cowardice and excess. We acquire these virtues by practice. The more we choose moderation, let's say, the more we will tend to be moderate. These then become *almost* like a habit. The acquisition of a virtue is called in Latin *habitus*, which means our general constitution has changed. Now, if we continually choose the opposite of virtue, or vice, we will change our general constitution in that way as well, and instead of virtuous, we will become vicious in certain ways. For example, if we always choose against courage, we will become cowards.

Once we have formed our consciences in accord with the teachings of the Church, we then must regularly examine our consciences against the decisions and actions which we perform. One good way to examine our conscience is found in our pew books on pages 2-6. This is something we should do before each and every Mass, since we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and we should be properly disposed

to receive Absolution. Also, it is great to do while we are forming our consciences since it helps us to focus on those things we are doing right as well as those things we still have to work on.

Our founder, Bishop Hodur, I believe summed it up best with this quote about worldly vs. Godly people:

The worldly man does not pay any attention to God, his relationship with Him, though he actually believes there is a God and would become incensed if he were to be called an unbeliever, but in his daily life he is not much concerned with the concept of God. God does not influence his manner of thinking, speaking or acting. It is completely otherwise for the reborn man. He takes everything to God. For him, God is the starting point, the measure of his work and the crowning point of his every effort. He lives in the presence of God, senses His presence and the influence of His grace. Similarly, the relationship of the reborn man to the world and to people changes fundamentally. The unrebored individual is grasping, greedy, demanding of sensual pleasures, likes to chase after riches and distinctions and is covetous of fame, praises and recognition. The reborn man does not care for all this. Wealth, fame, honors and sensual indulging are for him of passing, relative value. They are fleeting, poor symbols of human life, for which it is not worth endangering the eternal interests of the soul, spiritual welfare. *Naza Wiara, 1913*

So, the reborn person is the person with a well-formed conscience who lives in complete and utter freedom, while the ‘worldly’ person is enslaved to the passing things of this world, according to Bishop Hodur. The reborn person lives virtuously and avoids the vices of the worldly one.

So, if we ask ourselves, “Who am I?” we finally have a way to more fully answer that question. Even though we all begin life in the same way, that is not what

makes us unique. We are human beings made in the image and likeness of God. We either follow the teachings of Christ and His Church or we don't, and we are either virtuous or vicious, depending on how we have formed and obey our consciences. In the end, if we feast regularly on "the true bread that comes down from heaven" that gives "life to the world" we will be virtuous Christians with well-formed consciences. If we fast of this bread, we risk falling into viciousness and despair, lonely and apart from Christ and His love, and will be sad and lonely indeed.

So, who are you?