

Homily of Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

The readings of today reminds us of the readings and reflection of the 18th Sunday, five weeks ago. In the first reading of that Sunday we read, "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The vainness, helplessness, restlessness, emptiness, unfulfilled-ness of human being without God is, again, the focus of our reflection today.

Today's first reading says, "For the deliberations of mortal are timid, and unsure are our plans. For the corruptible body burdens the soul and earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns. And scarce do we guess the things on earth, and what is within our grasp we find difficult..."

Centuries ago, a Catholic Theologian, Blaise Pascal wrote, "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there, the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself."

In this quotation, Blaise Pascal confirms that in human being is an empty print, an empty trace, a void, a vacuum, a hole, an infinite abyss which finite human knowledge and human cravings alone are incapable of filling. God alone can fill it.

In the Gospel Jesus addresses us, "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ... Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." Jesus does not literally mean that we hate anyone in order to be his disciple. He does not mean that we should not have any earthly possessions. Jesus means that no one or no possession can take the place of God in our life. He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Stressing on Jesus' instruction St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote, "Prefer nothing to Christ, because he preferred nothing to us, and on our account preferred evil things to good, poverty to riches, servitude to rule, death to immortality."

There is God's space or God's vacuum in everyone and in every place. From creation till today, the Evil One has tempted and misdirected human beings to fill the God's space with possessions (worldly and ungodly things). Also, not only that there are attempts to fill God's space with possessions, many people and places hate and renounce God but prefer possessions. That is the root of evil in each human being, and in the world. Where God is rejected, or hated, or renounced; when the pursuit of possessions be it power, money, pleasure, wealth, job and so on, replace God, there's bound to be disorder. It is impossible for human beings, made by God, to be orderly without God who made them. Isaiah prophesies, "Woe to anyone who contends with their Maker" (Isaiah 45:9).

In the Gospel Jesus says, "Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? ... Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide with a thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?" We can interpret these words of Jesus to mean that we must always bring all our plans to God and become spiritually empowered before we proceed to execute the plans. Without God, we are lost.

I would like to conclude with Michael Smith's song:

This is the air I breathe
This is the air I breathe
Your holy presence living in me
This is my daily bread
This is my daily bread
Your very word spoken to me
And I I'm desperate for you
And I I'm lost without you...

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP