

Homily, 26 April 2015

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:8-12; Psalms 118:1,8-9,21-23,26,28,29; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18



Providence



When I was in college, while Janet and I were still dating, I remember spending a lot of time at her parent's house. We were in the same organic chemistry class, so we'd often spend the afternoon studying together before heading out somewhere for the evening.

I can remember sitting at the dining room table while her parents were busy in the kitchen. Often they would talk about "the kids," which, of course, meant Janet, her brother and sisters, and their spouses.

It was the first time I really understood that although we leave childhood behind, we are children forever. "Child," after all, is also a term for a relationship.

What brought that moment to mind, was a verse from our second reading:

"See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are."

And realizing that I am no longer a child, I also thought of St. Paul:

"when I became a man, I put aside childish things."



What does it mean to be an adult child of God? For John it was such an important idea that he also used it at the very beginning of his Gospel:

"... to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God ..."

When God created man in his image, he had an end in mind. Despite the fall of man, what God has intended from the beginning has not changed. That is God's providence. There is something waiting for us at the end of all things, something wonderful. It is our inheritance; it is why John calls us "*Children of God.*"

In fact, both of today's readings from John, from the letter and from the Gospel, have strong overtones of Providence: of God's guidance of creation, especially of his people, toward perfection and the joy of heaven; toward the inheritance waiting for "*those who accept him.*"



Yet Providence does not mean that God has preordained the particulars of our lives: that we are simply living out a script. Providence has three movements, which are repeated over and over and over:

- First, God takes the initiative and bestows on us acts of grace.
- Second, he allows us to respond how we will to his grace, knowing that some of our choices will lead us away from him.
- Finally, he always responds to our choices, always giving us the grace to make better a choice, even as he permits us to suffer the consequences of our poor ones.

Our part in God's providence is to choose God, to join the family if you will: to become his children.



Although God is always calling us, always inviting us, always giving us grace, he does not force anything upon us. He is a Father, not a slave driver. That's the meaning of many of the "I AM" sayings of Jesus:

- I am the good shepherd ...
- I am the light of the world.
- I am the gate.
- I am the vine ...
- I am the living bread ...
- I am the resurrection and the life ...



Jesus never said, I am, therefore you *must* ...

We have to choose. God is calling us to follow his son. Calling us to be part of his family, to share the inheritance Jesus won for us.

It is the first movement in Providence: guiding and encouraging us on the road to heaven.

“I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me ...”

Adolescence is a time for separating yourself from your parents, for establishing your independence. *“But when I became a man, I put aside childish things.”*

You cannot know God if you stay away. No relationship survives chronic neglect. We must care for our relationships. Work on them. Spend time together.

But it is not enough simply to work on your relationship with God. He wants us all to be brothers and sisters in Christ. What parent is happy when the kids don't get along, don't concern themselves with one another?

“I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved ...”

What parent or child, brother or sister, wants to pass through that gate alone?

God does not force his will on us, but he always invites us. If we are his, then we must do the same. When your brother or sister is walking away from the gate, go out to them; invite them back; tell them you will walk with them along the way.

The inheritance that Jesus won for us is not to be childishly hoarded but generously shared. That means we have to invite others to become part of the family and encourage one another to stay.

Though most of us are long past childhood, we are still God's children, still “the kids.”

Therefore, care for each other like adults and like family: encourage each other, console each other; pray for each other; forgive, teach, and love. But above all be there when someone needs you.

It's what family does best of all ... and it is our part in God's plan.