

Hom 28 C 2016      Homily October 9, 2016

There is a story from Jewish mythology that the Tree of Life in the middle of the Garden of Eden is really the tree of Souls. Each blossom on the Tree of Life is a new soul and when it is in full bloom it falls into something called the “Guf” or the “Treasury of Souls”. Each day the angel Gabriel reaches into the Treasury of Souls and takes out one soul at a time. At night while the potential parents are sleeping the angel Gabriel appears to them in a dream and asks them if they are willing to receive this particular soul. If they say “yes” then a life begins and a baby is conceived. If the parents say “no” the soul returns to the Guf and is never born. According to Rabbi Moshe Talin sparrows are the only birds which can detect souls coming to earth which is why they nest so close to homes. (Source: Wikipedia article *Tree of Souls* modified and embellished)

Two thousand years ago the angel Gabriel appeared in a dream to a young unmarried woman named Mary, and a young man named Joseph. The angel asked them: “Are you ready and willing to receive a child from the hand of God?”

“Yes,” they responded.

“This child will bring you great joy and unspeakable pain, He will be the cause of your leaving your home and family and fleeing to Egypt. You will be hated as foreigners and find yourselves hungry. Will you still receive this child?”

They responded “yes”.

“This child will disappear and you will search for him. You will know terror and fear. Will you still receive him?”

They answered “yes.”

“He will never bear you grandchildren. Your line will end and you will die receiving the charity of neighbors, Will you still welcome him?”

“We will welcome him” they answered.

“This child will leave home and you will hear stories about him and you will not be able to sleep at night. You will search for him and he will refuse your counsel and your soul will languish in worry. Will you still receive him?”

“Yes,” they answered.

“He will be tortured and rejected by the people. You will witness his life breathe go out from him. You will hold his dead body in your arms. Will you still welcome him into your lives?”

“We will welcome him,” they answered.

“Then,” said the angel Gabriel, “it shall be as you command, but, remember this---after all the joy and all the suffering involved in this child’s journey the treasure of this soul will far outweigh any hardship for God is the giver of good things. For your sacrifice you shall know a peace that you would never have known had this child not been born. Your spirits shall awaken to wonder and joy through this child. Joseph, you will have memories of him working at your side in the carpenter shop. Mary, you will delight every time you recall his smile, the laughter he brought to your home, the strength you witnessed grow in his heart, the enchantment of his words. Yes, Mary and Joseph with each soul that is received by man and woman there is always get pain, but the price of life is worth it because God for your gift of self will give you an eternity with your child. All your suffering shall in the end be a miniscule particle of sand before a sea shore of love.”

Jesus was born and brought the truth of things to humanity. We now know that all the details of the myth are not true. There is no Guf. What is true, however, is that every life is a gift, a blessing and somehow every human being must learn to accept pain and suffering as inevitable in life and look beyond the darkness with gratitude.

Mary and Joseph chose not to focus on the darkness. They focused on the Light, the good things, the blessings and it is because of this they were able to wake from every nightmare and laugh at the darkness. Gratitude defined them. They were grateful for the gift of their child. They were grateful to God! Gratitude is the ultimate sign that the Holy Spirit has claimed a soul.

Do you go through life as a grateful person? Despite all the bad things that happen to you do you keep getting up after you have been knocked down and look up at the heavens and say: "I still believe God is good. Thank you, Lord, for my blessings"?

Let me answer that question for you. "Yes," you keep getting up. You live your lives in gratitude, gratitude to God. Why do I say this today?

Ten lepers are cured. Only one returns to say "Thank You." The one who returns is not given a name. You know why? Because it is you. All people on the planet are blessed, but, you have come here today to say "Thank You to God for those blessings." We call what we are doing today the Eucharist. "Eucharist" is a Greek word. It means "to give thanks." We gather here in this hour to give thanks to God. How many people in the United States will gather in synagogues, and temples and churches this weekend to worship God? Maybe one in ten? You are one of them.

People look at all the religions in the world and they see the differences, what makes them separate from one another. Most all religions have something in common. They have people who have experienced gratitude. People come together to worship because they realize they have been blessed and the source of all those blessings is a Higher Power.

We believe that whether one is a Jew or a Protestant or a Catholic or a Moslem if they feel grateful to God, then what they are actually experiencing is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is only one God, one Higher Power and it is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But, no one owns God. So the Holy Spirit can blow where she wills. Gratitude to God is a sign on is connected to the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Bad things happen to you as individuals. Bad things happen to your children. Bad things happen to your spouses, to your parents, to everyone you love. But yet you are here aren't you? You have come to God's temple to say "Thank You" because you believe that goodness will triumph, that the light of the world is Christ Jesus and He shall have the last word.

You are the one leper who has returned to say "thank you." So, go, continue your journeys. God has wonderful things in store for you—an eternity filled with love.