

## Homily – June 23, 2024 – Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time



I recently had the opportunity to see the musical, *The Lion King*, in New York City. The animated movie came out 30 years ago in 1994, while the Broadway musical came out three years later in 1997 and has been playing there ever since. Like *Cats* and *Les Misérables*, *The Lion King* is more than just entertainment; it has deep spiritual themes running through it. In the first act, the lion king, Mufasa, sing to his young son, Simba, a song called “They Live in You.” Mufasa explains to his young son that the great kings of the past are watching over them from the stars above. If Simba feels alone, he can trust that the great kings are there to comfort and guide him. (We would call that the “communion of the saints”). Later in act two, without the company of his father, who has died tragically, Simba is feeling alone in life. An old woman, a wisdom figure, finds the lonely and forlorn Simba in the jungle, and she tells him to look into a pool of water. He sees only his own reflection at first and is skeptical. Soon, however, he sees his father’s face, and the song, “He lives in you” slowly grows to a crescendo. Simba’s father, from his place in the stars, says to his young son, “Remember who you are.” It’s a spiritual journey for the young cub as he matures into the Lion King.

When we remember those who have gone before us are still with us, then they have a chance of guiding us here. Many spiritual masters have said that the major problem we have, on our spiritual journeys, is not sin *per se* but forgetfulness. We forget who we are and slip into lesser identifications. We make the mistake of identifying with our titles, our social status, our emotions, and even our faults and flaws and end up saying, “that’s me!” when in fact it’s not you at all. We whittle ourselves down and, in the process, whittle God down to an image we can handle,

or maybe even manipulate. Finally, we end up disappointed with both ourselves and God. Once in a while we need God or a wisdom figure, who has been put on our path by God, to force us to look into the pool and reconnect us to God's wonderful plan for us. Hint: If you can't find a pool to look into, find a baby and look into their eyes.

Job, the epitome of honesty and righteousness in the Old Testament, is struggling with the question of why bad things happen to good people. Life does not seem just or fair for Job. He has led a good life and, for his reward, he has everything that he values taken away from him—his livestock, his house, his wife, his children, his health, etc. While he doesn't curse God, Job is obviously disappointed and feels like God has forgotten and abandoned him. God responded, in that first reading, something like this: "Job, I know you have some questions for me, but I have some questions for you, and I want some straight answers. Where were you when I created the earth? Tell me, since you know so much! Who came up with the blueprint, Job, for the universe and all that is in it? Who took charge of the ocean when it gushed forth like a baby from the womb? That was me! I wrapped the waters in soft clouds and set the bounds for it so it wouldn't run loose. Do you think for a moment that I, who created the entire cosmos and put meaning into it, would be incapable of caring for you, little you? Do you think I could have possibly lost you in the shuffle of all that is going on in the universe? Not a chance, Job. Not a chance. Remember who you are and whose you are. Remember who is in your midst."

The fundamental problem in the spiritual life is forgetfulness. Jesus told us to eat his body and drink his blood in *remembrance* of him. If we don't eat and drink, like he commanded us to do, we risk amnesia; we will forget who Jesus is and who we are.

In all four gospels there is a story of the apostles facing a dilemma. They have thousands of hungry people before them, and they have no idea how they are going to feed them all. Their solution was to throw up their arms in defeat and try to send the crowds away to fend for themselves. What was their fundamental

problem? Forgetfulness. They forgot who was in their midst. They forgot that in the crowd of 5,000 hungry people stood Jesus who already told them that his flesh is food for the world. There is enough in him to feed the world and to have massive amounts of leftovers.

What was the real problem of the apostles on the boat in today's gospel story? The windstorm? The waves beating against the boat? The risk of drowning? No. The real problem was their forgetfulness. They forgot who was in their presence. The one who was in their midst was the very one who created the waters and the wind and who also has power over them. Can you believe it in your own life? Can you believe there is a Being who never forgets your concerns even in the midst of global crises like climate change, the war in Gaza, the displaced immigrants, those languishing in refugee camps, and those dying of loneliness? Jesus not only rebukes the wind and sea, but he also rebukes the apostles for their lack of faith, which I'm calling forgetfulness.

Is it enough to stand in awe and cheer on our hero Messiah who seemingly has power, that we don't have, to feed 5,000 people with so little food and calm a storm with just a word? No. We must collaborate with the Divine whose greatest miracles are never done alone but in and through Jesus' human flesh and ours.

While the apostles are in awe saying to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and sea obey him?" Jesus has another agenda. While they look outward in awe, he wants them to look inward. His question is, "**Why have you so little faith?**" I think it's another way of saying, "Why have you forgotten who is in your midst?"

God may seem to be distant in our lives at times, but that's just our perspective. Jesus says, "**My Father never stops working** (even on the Sabbath) **and neither do I.**" What do they never stop doing? Working for your good and the salvation of the world.

Jesus told us in last Sunday's gospel that a man scatters seed on the ground, and while he sleeps, it sprouts and grows, and he has no idea how it happens. In fact, he's asleep while the real thing happens. God is always at work even when we think He's asleep in the stern, asleep at the wheel we might say. In this gospel, I think Jesus is the only one truly awake.

There is a spiritual book that I haven't read yet, but I'd like to read. It's entitled, I Was Blind, But Now I Squint. Perhaps coming to spiritual insight is closer to that than: I was blind, but now I see. Growing in the spiritual life is slow, gradual, full of doubts and struggles, hungers and storms. And maybe that's why we have to keep coming to the Table every week. As we are being fed by His body and blood, can we believe that our lives broken and shared—and not just Jesus'-- can feed a multitude? As we are being nourished by His word, can we believe that a well-placed word from our lips—and not just Jesus' words--can calm a storm in someone else's life?

Look into the pool and keep staring long enough until you see past your reflection and see the One who lives in you.

*~ Fr. Phil*