

Homily for Sunday, November 2, 2025 (All Souls)



That first reading from the Book of Lamentations, Scripture scholars don't know who wrote it. Their best guess is that the Prophet Jeremiah wrote it. It starts off quite depressing; that's probably why it's called "lamentations." It's the year 586 B.C.E., and Jeremiah is looking at the once-beautiful city of Jerusalem now in ruins. The Babylonians have invaded and took over the country of Judah destroying everything in their path including the capital city of Jerusalem and the sacred Temple. This makes me think of the beautiful images of Gaza City before the conflict with Israel contrasted with the heart-breaking pictures after its destruction. If the ceasefire holds, where do you even begin rebuilding the city, never mind rebuilding people's lives? Jeremiah says, ***"I've forgotten what happiness is...gone is my glory...I feel homeless...my soul is bowed down."*** I am sure those sentiments are echoed not only in Gaza but in every person who has ever experienced a time of hopelessness in their lives. No doubt that includes every one of us here at one point. Jeremiah looks at the ruined buildings and ruined lives and knows only God can make it right. Only God can restore life where there seems to be only death. Feeling he has only God left, Jeremiah vows to quietly wait on the Lord, who will bring salvation. He won't curse the darkness, but he'll wait for the Light. He's convinced the Lord is mysteriously at work in this mess.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians is practical yet hopeful, just like Jeremiah was 600 years prior. Paul knows that we will all die, but he also knows that in God, we really don't die. In the twinkling of an eye, God—and God alone—can transform death into life, mortality into immortality, perishability into imperishability. Paul invites us to surrender to God who not only swallows up death but even taunts death with, “Hey, Death. **Where is your sting?** Is that all you got?” We cannot avoid death nor engineer eternal life. However, we can start, long before we are on our death beds, to surrender to God who offers us the same victory over death that Jesus experienced in his own resurrection.

All Jesus wants to do is to freely give us what he has freely received from God—eternal life. Children, including mere infants, can't fully appreciate this gift intellectually, but they know how to receive it. That's all Jesus wants of us—to be open to what he wants to give away.

Jesus says, ***“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.”*** I don't think God is into playing a cat-and-mouse game with us deliberately hiding from some people and revealing himself to others. I think it's more of a mindset on our part. For we are told that it is God's gracious will that everything the Father gave to Jesus, Jesus equally desires to give to us. That's what it means to be gracious—to live by grace. Grace is nothing we can earn, only receive, like a gift. The problem is that, unlike children who have to live by the graciousness of others—especially their parents—we, the so-called wise and intelligent, want to earn everything by our

own efforts. This attitude feels good to the ego, might help us climb the corporate ladder, but is not much help in the spiritual life. The truth is, and children know this better than adults, our little lives are continually being sustained by a greater life living and breathing in us. We are never independent of that life. This life that God eagerly wants to give away, as a gift, wants only to be received with the same eagerness. Children are the best recipients. Their open trust is what the intelligent cannot manage. People who trust in their own devices usually have a hard time trusting in God.

It makes me think of the first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis. God puts our primordial parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Paradise. In the beginning everything was as it was meant to be. Two trees, the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” were in the middle of this wonderful garden (Gen. 2:9). Adam and Eve were given permission by God to eat of any tree in the garden, including the tree of life, but they were forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I often wondered about why God would forbid them from doing this until I placed it next to today’s gospel. It seems that God was trying, from the very beginning, to hide something from Adam and Eve. Similarly, Jesus tells us that the mysteries of God are also hidden from those who think they are wise and intelligent.

The moment we have a little bit of truth, we think we have the whole truth. Once we think we have the whole truth, who needs God and who needs others? Once we eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we quickly become the judge—falsely, I might add--of what is good and what is evil; what is right and

what is wrong; what is light and what is darkness. We become know-it-alls. The only group of people that Jesus couldn't do anything with were the know-it-alls, the Pharisees. They thought they had all the answers. They thought knowledge of the Law, and fulfilling every scrupulous edict of the Law, would save them. They laid heavy burdens on people and never lifted a finger to lighten people's loads. Jesus, on the other hand, says, ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."***

St. Paul, before his conversion, was the Pharisee of all Pharisees. He knew the Law inside and out, intellectually. He could even use the Law to justify putting followers of Jesus to death. After his conversion, he writes in today's second reading, ***"the power of sin is the law."*** What an about-face! God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they were doomed to die. Paul, the know-it-all Pharisee, knew that he was dead, and that scrupulous adherence to the Law was the thing that was killing him. He also knew that if his relationship was based on Jesus, and not on the Law, he would be alive. He humbled himself and began eating from the tree of life and no longer from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Maybe that's why God has hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and has preferred to reveal them to infants. It's not a cat and mouse game. It's more that know-it-alls are simply not open to the revelation of God and children are. When you feel you know it all, you become very judgmental of everyone else. Jesus warns us not to judge so that we will not be judged.

Once Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, paradise was no longer paradise, the once beautiful cities of Jerusalem and Gaza were reduced to ruins. All they could do was dream of a day when God's salvation, God's grace, would once again reign and paradise would once again be paradise.

Once we think we know it all, who's good and who's bad, who's right and who's wrong, who are the good guys and who are the bad guys, we inch our way out of paradise and away from God's plan for humanity. Put yourself back into Paradise to a time before you thought in terms of good and evil. In God's world, the kingdom Jesus tries to give to us as pure gift, nothing and no one is lost. So, come to me, you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, eat of the tree of life, for your salvation is at hand.

~Fr. Phil