

The Inclusive Community

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

February 14, 2010

Valentine's Day

Luke 6:17. 20-26

Homily of Rev. Dr. Anthony T. Padovano

The Beatitudes mark one of the most significant moments in the life of Jesus. He defines himself and the movement he has inspired. None of the miracles of Jesus will have the impact that these few lines will have on understanding Jesus of Nazareth and the essence of what Christianity is.

Let me begin by commenting on two issues: the miracles of Jesus and the doctrine or creeds of Christianity.

The Miracles of Jesus

The miracles of Jesus were not as exceptional as many suppose. The ancient world was filled with miracle workers. Roman and Greek shamans did miracles; Israel was filled with stories of miracle workers. The miracles did not prove that Jesus was divine or the Messiah, a Son of God or even the most important prophet in Jewish history.

Jesus was especially effective with exorcisms. An exorcism in the ancient world was a healing, not so much an expulsion of a demon as the curing of a disease. To cure a disease one had to pay attention to the patient and, most important, have the patient trust the healer. Every healing was a dialogue, between the healer who believed love could conquer illness and that hope could take away despair. The afflicted person had to believe this. If there was no faith in the one who was ill, there was no cure.

It was not the miracle but the dialogue that mattered. If the one who was sick trusted the disease more than the healer, believed in the illness more than recovery, nothing happened. The one who was ill left in despair and the healer became silent. The dialogue ended.

The Doctrine or Creeds

Christianity, like Judaism and Islam, did not begin with creeds and doctrines. Judaism and Islam never developed doctrine or creeds. They call for, even today, what Christianity called for in its first centuries, namely trust in God and works of mercy. What happened to Christianity?

Let us look for a moment at what faith is. Faith comes from the Greek word “pistis” which, in Latin, is “fides.” It is important to know a little Latin in order to get the theology. “Fides” in Latin does not mean “believe.” It means “trust.” We have the root of “fides” in the English word “fidelity.” Fidelity is not belief; it is faithfulness. One who is faith-ful does not believe in a creed. The one who is faithful is trusting and trustworthy.

Jesus called the disciples to trust in God and to be faithful to that trust. A creed was beside the point. What I affirm about someone I love is less important than the fact I trust them and they trust me. Affirmations are about the past and trust is about the future. Love is not about the past but the future.

Let us now try to put all this together.

There are no miracles without trust. The point of all miracles is to establish trust. The miracle of love is the act by which I say to another I trust you, with my whole life. I do not know where this trust will take me specifically but I trust you.

Jesus asked for trust, not dogma. What we call a creed today is not supposed to be about dogma but trust. Let us try a little Latin one more time. “creed” comes from the Latin “Credo”; “Credo,” “I believe” comes from two Latin words “cor” and “do.” “cor” means “heart” in Latin; “do” means “I give.” The word “creed” means “I give you my heart.” Creeds or dogmas were not about belief or miracles or specifics. They were about trust and love and giving your heart to someone or something.

The Beatitudes are a summons to trust and give your heart, not to wealth (blessed are the poor) nor to excessive eating in a world of famines (blessed are the hungry) nor to being focused on our own life while others are suffering (blessed are those who weep) nor in wanting everyone to see you and celebrate only you (blessed are those who are rejected and see others). Jesus did not call for a creed but for a miracle – a miracle which would reach the human heart to its core. Jesus proclaims that if you trust God, if you give your heart to God, then the money and the excessive eating, the comfort in only your own life and the incessant need to be noticed will not matter.

It is Valentine’s Day. If you love someone, you work out beatitudes with them. You tell them you love them more than what you own; that you would rather be hungry with them than eat while they are famished; that you cannot laugh or be comfortable if they are grief stricken; that you would rather be rejected and have their company than be acclaimed by all the world; indeed, even if your family and friends do not accept your love for this person, you will take the side of the one you love and be rejected with them; if it is a same

sex or interracial relationship and the world you live in rejects this, you will accept the rejection and remain faithful to the one you love.

Love is a lyric of beatitudes. Christianity was meant to be that. It was about the creed of love, not dogma. It was about giving your heart away. It was “cor” “do” – credo - creed. To be a Christian meant that you proclaimed: “I just gave my heart away.”

Happy Valentine’s Day.