

Sermon: 14th Ordinary Sunday

Introduction

- Easter celebrations over
- Gay celebrations over
- Macy's 4th of July Fireworks done

Now it's time for the ordinary season – GREEN

Time to relax, enjoy the summer, go to the beach ... take it easy.

OR

Maybe it's time to get ready.

Some thoughts rooted in today's Gospel reading

Idea #1: General Background for today's gospel

We are reading from the Gospel of Matthew – which is called Cycle A readings

Cycle B: Mark – next year

Cycle C: Luke – the following year

But there is no Cycle for John

... because he's so different.

But that makes today's gospel reading rather interesting: it reads...

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

It has a rather interesting ring to it – sounds almost like the Gospel of John, where we have these passages – *"I and the father are one"*; *"If you are in me and I am in you – then you are in the father."* ...etc. etc. John's gospel is loaded with these kinds of statements.

This is the only place in all three synoptic gospels where you will find a passage like this. So it seems out of place ... which then raises the broader question – what is the relationship between the "story of Jesus" as told in Mark – Luke – Matthew; and the "story of Jesus" told in the Gospel of John?

Idea #2: The picture of Jesus in the Synoptics and the picture of Jesus in John's Gospel are really quite different.

1. Synoptics begin with the historical start of Jesus' life
John begins with creation itself
2. Synoptics have Jesus baptized by John
John makes no mention of the baptism of Jesus
3. Synoptics presents Jesus speaking in aphorism and parables
There are NO parables in John/rather long speeches
4. Synoptics present Jesus as a faith healer and sage
John presents Jesus as a mystic and philosopher
5. Synoptics present Jesus as an exorcist
In John Jesus performs NO exorcisms
6. In the Synoptics Jesus main message is the Kingdom of God
In John Jesus main message is himself

-this is what have in today's gospel reading, where Jesus talks about himself, which he never does in the Synoptics (except here) – this is only in the Gospel of John

7. In the Synoptics Jesus preaches about the poor and oppressed
In John Jesus says nothing about the poor or oppressed
8. In the Synoptics Jesus ministry lasts one year
In John Jesus' ministry lasts three years
9. In the Synoptics the Temple Incident occurs at the end of his ministry
In John the Temple incident occurs at the beginning of his ministry
10. In the Synoptics Jesus is arrested and tried because of the Temple Incident

In John Jesus is arrested and tried because he raised Lazarus from the dead

11. In the Synoptics the Last Supper focuses on the Institution of the Eucharist
In John there is no mention of the Eucharist
12. In the Synoptics there is no mention of the Washing of the Feet
In John the Last Supper the washing of the feet of the disciples is the main event.

So then, WHAT IS the “story of Jesus” – which version? If all we had was the Gospel of John, our picture of Jesus would be completely different than it is now...because for the most part we follow the Synoptic version. So do we simply ‘squosh’ them together – which is what the Church has done in the past.

That is not really fair to the sources we have – which have their own integrity, purpose and intent.

Idea #3: So what’s going on here and why am I pointing this out?

Answer: In order to demonstrate that the New Testament and what we know about Jesus is the result of actually a long history of composition and development

Stage One: - 40’s (first ten years of Christianity)

Sayings of Jesus are collected and circulated

Gospel of Thomas

The Q-Gospel

Stories about Jesus are collected and circulated

(no documents found so far)

The core of the Passion Narrative is put together as a lament based on verses in the psalms.

Here Jesus is simply a Rabbi (a Ravi) and faith healer – and people remember what he said, what he did, and how he died.

Stage Two: - 50's – 60's (next twenty years of Christianity)

The Letters of Paul

His major concern: how to understand how Jesus fit into the Jewish religion; and how to adapt that understanding to non-Jewish peoples.

For example Paul never mentions any sayings of Jesus; nor does he mention any stories about Jesus – just stories about the community that has already formed around Jesus.

Stage Three: - 70's-80's (next twenty years of Christianity)

Where the Temple has been destroyed

Mark – and then Matthew and Luke – write their story of Jesus – to show how Christianity should now be “the Way” to follow – the new understanding of what Judaism should be now that the temple had been destroyed.

...while Acts reflects on the “history” of the early Christian community as remembered some 50 years later.

...and the Didache gives us first evidence of the liturgy and worship of the Christian community.

Stage Four – 90's to 120's (next thirty years of Christianity)

The focus has shifted from the message BY Jesus to the message ABOUT Jesus – reflected in the writings of John. This is the start of the Christological debates that will only end with the great Ecumenical councils hundreds of years in the future.

Idea #4: Well that's all interesting – but so what?

The significance of this is that we have evidence WITHIN THE NEW TESTAMENT itself – of development. That with time, the understanding of who Jesus was, what his ministry was about, how that translated into what it meant to be a Christian – the whole Christian edifice – changed, developed and grew over time.

Christianity did NOT start all automatically. Boom! And now we have full blown Christianity! It only developed over time and has a whole history of change and evolution.

And that phenomenon can be seen in the New Testament itself.

This is called the development of dogma – the development of scripture – the evolving “story of Jesus”.

It was recognized by Vatican Council II

-but has been resisted and denied by the “traditionalists” ever since.

And this is going to be one of the key issues raised in the up-coming Synod of Bishops

Idea #5: The Synod of Bishops

The Synod of Bishops will meet this October

It will consist of the presidents of the National Bishops Conference from countries around the world – plus additional invited bishops – which itself is an interesting “restructuring” of the hierarchy (in the past it would have been the cardinals and/or archbishops – who have canonical status – presidents of National Conferences do not)

They will discuss a whole series of critical contemporary issues:

Birth control/divorce and remarriage/pre-marital sex/cohabitation/

Same sex unions/abortion/in vitro fertilization

All the “sex” issues which the Church seems to be so hung up on.

...which is rather interesting in itself. As a friend of mine stated:

“That’s odd. A bunch of geriatric men, who have never been married, have no children, and supposedly have not had sex ... are going to decide what is right and wrong about these issues. Rather ironic!”

They have already issued a document which they will use as the basis of their discussions the “***Instrumentum Laboris***” which is about 85 pages long. You can access it on the Vatican website if you want to read it.

It is based on the surveys that were taken by the various episcopal conferences over the last six months.

And as you go through the document; or as you review the history of the various surveys taken – you can see the struggle going on – the issue of “DEVELOPMENT”

For example:

-On the one hand the document says “there will be no changes in dogma”

-But then it goes on to say that “there may be changes in pastoral ministry”

-All hiding the deeper issue – which actually was one of the major deeper issues at the Second Vatican Council.

We seem to be having “round two” over the battle of development (which by the way the traditionalist call “*relativism*”)

This past week’s NCR issue [Vol. 50 No. 19 July 4-17] has a good review of all of this if you’re interested.

Actually this up-coming synod is going to then be followed up by a second synod in 2016 where bishops from around the world will be chosen to attend – a “mini” Vatican III.

Here are four issues to watch as all of this evolves:

#1: the development of dogma (as I mentioned)

Three others include:

#2: Sensus Fidei

Basic idea; what do you do if the majority of Catholics simply say “No I don’t accept that” (like artificial birth control) – isn’t there a certain “infallibility” to the sensus fidei (the “sense of the faithful”). Traditionalist object that the Church is not run based on survey’s and majority opinion. But we are not simply talking about a survey ... but a practice. 85% of Catholics simply don’t follow this

discipline ... 85% of Catholics have already decided ... Contraception is okay. And there is a certain “infallibility” in the consensus of the Church.

#3: Natural Law

Basic idea: that there is in nature a certain way of doing things – a “law” built into the very nature of things. Is this a valid approach to understanding who and what we are? We in the LGBTQ community are actually victims of this way of thinking – homosexuality is a sin against nature – it is not according to natural law. But then how do you define natural law – especially given modern understanding of genetics? ... and the modern understanding of “nature” as malleable and changeable.

#4: Christian Anthropology

Basic idea: a human being is made up of a body and soul. Who says so??? Where did this idea come from??? This is not any part of the preaching of Jesus. It is a Platonic by way of Augustine and an Aristotelian by way of Aquinas idea. Maybe it’s not the best way of understanding who we are as human beings.

My own preference is not to think of a person as a “thing”, but as an “event” ... in time-space reality ... a totally new way of understanding “nature”.

It will be interesting to see how the synods deal with these four topics – probably not explicitly, but implicitly as it emerges from their “pastoral” considerations. These are the things to watch and pay attention to.

CONCLUSION:

In any case, I think we have some interesting times ahead of us – at least in terms of the Church and what it does in the future – how it understands itself – and what it recommends and suggests as we live out our lives.

If you are interested, and want to “prepare” for all of this, you might do some research on your own – look into these four ideas – see what they entail – notice

how they are dealt with in the “*Instrumentum Laboris*” ... which again you can access from the Vatican web-site.

As for US – TODAY - this of course IS all rather academic – although the results can have both beneficial and detrimental implications in the future.

But for right now we can take heart in the final statement of today’s gospel, actually ...

²⁸ *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Another translation for the word “easy” is ... “simple” ... to be a Christian, in one sense is SIMPLE ... “*Love God and love your neighbor.*” ... that’s it. Really that simple.

So on the one hand, if you’re inclined to delve into the labyrinths of the structures of our Church and its theology, then focus on these four themes:

1. The development of dogma
2. The Sensus Fidei
3. Natural Law
4. Christian Anthropology

And if not, then it’s simple:

...Love God and love your neighbor

... and then go to the beach, relax and have fun.