



Archbishop of Montreal

Homily

Sunday, June 21, 2020

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (Mt 10:26-33)

The Loneliness of Body, Heart and Mind

“What I say to you in the dark, tell it in the light.” What does Jesus say to us in the dark, and what must we speak about in the light? And what does “in the dark” mean? It refers to what I say to you when you find yourself in darkness, in the darkness of your life, in the darkness of your existence.

There’s an element of darkness pervading everyday life, which we experience at certain moments of our life and, perhaps, we are feeling some of that today. Certainly, this pandemic is a form of darkness. Another form of darkness present throughout life and which every person must confront is loneliness, which many are feeling probably more so during this pandemic. Loneliness confronts all of us, all human beings, each person in different ways.

There is a loneliness that affects the body. Human beings are meant to be with people; human beings are meant to share with others, to develop relationships with them. The human person exists as an individual in his/her own right, with an ego, free will, intelligence and emotions that are unique to him or her. But at the same time, each person exists to be in relationship: with God, with another, with other people. The loneliness that afflicts the body is somewhat like the distance that can occur in a relationship. Distancing, even if only physical, has an impact. When circumstances make it impossible for someone to accompany a sick loved one and give him or her a hug, this is a form of loneliness affecting the body; it has an impact on individuals. Because the body is never just a body. The body is a person! The body is the visible manifestation of a person. The body is the expression of a person. When we touch a body, we touch a human being. When we move away from a body, we move away from a human being. That is a form of loneliness that affects the body.

There is also a loneliness that affects the heart, because human beings are made to be loved and to love. Loneliness afflicts the heart when we have no one to love. When no one loves us. We might experience loneliness only temporarily when we encounter difficult moments in our relationships. Maybe we feel our heart has been deserted, that no one loves us, that there is no one to love. That is one of the most difficult moments in life. It is one of the toughest hardships to bear in life!

There is also a loneliness that affects the mind, so to speak. This is a loneliness that can invade the mind when we struggle to find the meaning of life. And surely during this pandemic, some of you might have taken a second look at your life, wondering at one point whether it has meaning. As we live our busy lives, always having somewhere to go or something to do, then coming home and doing the same, we tend to forget at times what is the meaning of our life. But when our life is put “on hold” because of sickness or the threat of sickness, like COVID-19 currently has done, perhaps we stop for a moment and ask ourselves: What is the meaning of my life? What am I living for? Why am I working in that job, which keeps me so busy? Sometimes, the questioning even extends to the family because we may be unaccustomed to spending so

much time together, which the pandemic has made necessary; this can expose our weaknesses and wounds! Why ... Why?

This loneliness makes itself felt in the body, heart and mind. It is the essential loneliness confronting each person in various ways and at different levels. And loneliness is a real hardship, but it is even more of a hardship because we are not made to be alone! In Genesis, God himself says in the creation story: "It is not good that the man should be alone." We were not created to be alone! We were created to live as individuals, body and soul, but not to be alone. We have been created to live in openness with others. We are made to be in relationship with others.

Loneliness eventually hits us, because we tend to flee from it through various pleasures and distractions, perhaps even alcohol and drugs. But loneliness remains there, somewhere, lurking in the shadows like a threat. And we may want to run away from it, but it catches up with us. Loneliness catches up with us.

Being confronted with loneliness is so difficult to bear. Let's imagine, for example, that someone is caught in a burning building on the 10th floor. The situation may become so desperate that he or she may want to jump out the window, even if they are on the 10th floor, just to escape the fire. Sometimes to escape loneliness, we throw ourselves into unsatisfying experiences. But the goal is not to jump out the window, but to flee from the fire of loneliness burning within us!

So, when we are surrounded by the darkness of loneliness, we are called to realize that we are not alone. For instance, let me take one example from among others, because not all examples apply to everyone: when I am in a forest, I walk. I follow a path. But if I see a stream, a flower or a mountain, I may get distracted and leave the path. A few hours later, I might realize that I am lost. At first, it was fun because I was discovering the landscape, but now I am scared because I have lost my way. I am lost. Just when I realize that I am lost, when I thought I was completely alone, all of a sudden, someone is there, right by my side. I do not know from where the person came, how he came to be there, but he is there and is guiding me.

Jesus has the power to stand beside us always whenever we feel lonely. That is the truth. He is there regardless of the intensity and depth of our loneliness. Jesus Christ is always there. And that power is doubled, even tripled! This is divine power in action because, as God, He remains close to his creatures, to all the creatures of God. Jesus is close, very close to us. He ensured that He would be close to us. First, He assumed a human nature. In doing so, it is as though our human nature becomes the language through which He speaks and draws close to us, so to speak. He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Sometimes we move away from ourselves, but Jesus remains right beside us always. Second, He does so because He is God. He assumed our human nature to become a human being. And, third, He bore the entire weight of our loneliness when He was on the cross. Hanging on the cross, in his plea "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He saw the extent of the loneliness crushing the body, heart and mind, and He bore it all. He bore the loneliness that we feel, the loneliness of body, heart and mind. He bore the weight of it on the cross, and in doing so one might say that He became the most solitary man in the history of humanity! Jesus, the Son of God made man, was the loneliest human being in the history of humanity when He hung on the cross, because He bore the totality of our loneliness.

No matter how intense or deep our loneliness is, no matter how overwhelmed we might feel, Jesus remains right by our side. When the darkness of loneliness invades us, what does Jesus say to us in that darkness: "I am with you always. I am with you always. Remember that I am with you always."

This is where prayer is of utmost importance, because it is during prayer that we will hear Jesus tell us: "I am with you always." It is during prayer that we discern Jesus Christ's presence. It is during prayer that we realize that we are not alone. At one moment in his ministry, Jesus speaks about the depth of his loneliness, saying: "I am deeply grieved, even to death." Jesus felt the

crushing weight that loneliness brings to bear. But at the same time, as though in self-reflection, this response: "... yet, I am not alone because the Father is with me."

As a human being, Jesus felt the depth of loneliness, but He knew He was not alone. This is reflected in his plea from the cross, when He cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But those words were not addressed to those standing at the foot of the cross, as if to say: "He has forsaken me." No, Jesus addressed his plea — "Why have you forsaken me?" — to the Father. So, if Jesus was speaking to the Father, it is because Jesus wanted to say that He knows the Father has not abandoned Him. He knows the Father is there, and Jesus cries out to Him: "Why have you forsaken me?"

His words offer another way to pray. When you feel lonely, really lonely, and are overwhelmed by loneliness, say to Jesus: "Jesus, why have you forsaken me?" But as you tell Him that, know deep down that He has not abandoned you! We know He listens to us. We know He hears us. We know He is here. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And what were the last words Jesus uttered on the cross: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Jesus knows the Father is there. So, "Jesus, why have you forsaken me?" and "Into your hands I commend my spirit." Into your hands I commend my heart. I commend my body. Carry me. Strengthen me. Guide me. Console me.

In the darkness of our loneliness, Jesus speaks to our hearts, saying: "Do not fear. Do not fear; I am with you always!" And He does not stop there, which is amazing! He goes a lot further, telling us: "No one can snatch [you] out of the hands of the Father." And "Through my grace, I place you firmly in the Father's hands." Nobody, no power on Earth, no power in hell, no power of darkness, no one can snatch you out of the Father's hands. Those in the Father's hands, those whom I place in the Father's hands, the moment you are in the Father's hands, nothing can snatch you away. No matter what happens or the struggles you go through, no matter the illness, the failure, or how lonely you feel, nothing can snatch you out of the hands of the Eternal Father. Nothing! "Do not fear. I am with you always. Nothing can snatch you out of the hands of the Father."

Now we can understand what He said as we stand in darkness, looking back at what we have experienced or are currently going through. So, can we remain silent when we hear these words — "Do not fear; I am with you always; You are in the hands of the Father, and nothing, no one and no power in the world, or in hell, can snatch you out of the hands of the Father; there isn't any power that can snatch you out of the Father's hands" — and when we experience the peace and strength that faith in Jesus Christ offers? Can we keep that treasure or secret to ourselves and tell no one?

We now understand what Jesus meant when He said: "What I say to you in the dark, what I say to you when you are in the dark, do not fear; I am with you always; do not fear, for you are in the Father's hands." Speak of it in the light. Shout it from the rooftops. Proclaim it publicly. That is your mission. I give you a mission when I say to you what Jesus said: "Do not fear, for I am with you always, do not fear, for nothing can snatch you out of the hands of the Father!"

Your mission is to proclaim throughout the Earth that Jesus Christ is with us and that He has the power to place us firmly in the hands of the Father, and nothing can snatch us out of the Father's hands. Do not keep this treasure for yourself! Share it everywhere throughout the Earth! It becomes a duty! It becomes a mission! It becomes an assignment! It becomes absolutely necessary. For our hearts, it is a necessity. Our hearts need to share this richness in a profusion of joy!

As we are on the eve of reopening the doors of our churches, about to begin the process of "deconfinement," let us ask for the grace to thank God truly for the gift of faith. Let us ask for the grace to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ! To proclaim, to go forth proclaiming the Good News!

Today, not only do we speak about the COVID-19 pandemic, but also about an epidemic — if not a pandemic — of fake news! But there is good news, powerful enough to counter all fake and bad news: the Good News brought by Jesus Christ!

Thanksgiving

As a prayer of Thanksgiving, we are going to invoke the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This great prayer was officially approved in 1899, but it originated in the 17th century. Venerable Anne-Madeleine Rémuzat (1696-1730) of Marseille composed 10 of the invocations and promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart during the Great Plague.

The Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, have mercy on us.

Lord, have mercy on us.

Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven,

Have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world,

Have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit,

Have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, One God,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Son of the Eternal Father,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mother,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, substantially united to the Word of God,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, of infinite majesty,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, holy Temple of God,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Tabernacle of the Most High,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, House of God and Gate of Heaven,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, burning Furnace of charity,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Vessel of justice and love,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Abyss of all virtues,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, most worthy of all praise,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, King and centre of all hearts,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, in Whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the divinity,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, in Whom the Father was well pleased.

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, of whose fullness we have all received,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, desire of the everlasting hills,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, patient and abounding in mercy,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, rich unto all who call upon thee,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Fountain of life and holiness,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Propitiation for our sins,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, filled with reproaches,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, bruised for our offenses,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, made obedient unto death,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, pierced with a lance,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Source of all consolation,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, our Life and Resurrection,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, our Peace and Reconciliation,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Victim for our sins,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Salvation of those who hope in Thee,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Hope of those who die in Thee,

Have mercy on us.

Heart of Jesus, Delight of all the saints,

Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,

Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
Graciously hear us, O Lord,
Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.

Jesus meek and humble of heart,
R̄ Make our hearts like unto Thine.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal