

Homily
Mass of Installation
Bishop Blase J. Cupich as the Sixth Bishop of Spokane
September 3, 2010
Feast of St. Gregory the Great

The late Father David Toolan wrote in his book *At Home in the Cosmos* that physicists, even those who are agnostics and atheists, are coming to the conclusion that creation from its very beginning was programmed to bring about human life as we know it today. As a physicist would put it, in the first nanoseconds of the Big Bang, all of the molecules and the force fields that hold them together, and the building blocks for DNA needed for human life and mind, were present. The initial conditions of the universe were so very finely tuned for the development of our life that one could say that from the very beginning, all of creation, all the cosmos, was waiting for us to arrive, waiting for us to be born.

That insight from the world of science coincides so strikingly with what we hear throughout salvation history recorded in the Bible. Time and again, God reveals that those born in His image are His chosen, His elect, called from the womb to be the light to the nations, a holy nation, a people set apart. Repeatedly, we hear of God's unrelenting and untiring attempts to convince His people of their full promise and potential. Yet, there is another side to the story of salvation: our refusal, or better, our resistance. The people preferred less ambitious gods, for what the God of Abraham wanted was just too much, was too much to believe. "What is man that you care for him?" the psalmist asks with a sense of wonder, as if to say, why bother with us who are so weak and insignificant? We're not up to it.

That struggle is felt by each one of us. Every so often we get a glimpse of the greatness to which we are called as creatures made in God's image. Yet, somehow we end up finding it too much to believe, particularly when we come face-to-face with our self-disappointing ways.

That struggle, that internal tussle between promise and perdition, is on full display in the Gospel scene just proclaimed, especially in the person of Thomas. We are told he is called Didymus, a name that means "twin." How appropriate. There are two sides to him. Like the other disciples, after the brutal and shameful death of Jesus, he cowers in fear and disappointment, even to the

point of not showing up. Being with the others would only remind him of those exhilarating days on the shores of Galilee when they first left everything behind to follow this carpenter's son from Nazareth and witnessed the power of His words and deeds. All that is now gone; the best is now behind them. And of course, associating with the other disciples, who like him abandoned Jesus, would only cut deeper into that wound of his disappointment and desertion.

Yet, there is another side to this twin, Thomas. Something inside of him brings him back, and as a result, he becomes *the* disciple that Jesus uses to show the way to reconcile that age-old struggle in humanity. The Risen Lord invites Thomas to put aside for a moment his preoccupation with his own wounds, the disappointment, the fear, the anxiety, and instead touch the wounds of His body. Christ does so, not because He is indifferent to the sufferings of Thomas. No, something else is happening here. St. Gregory the Great, who was ordained the Bishop of Rome 1,420 years ago on this very day, insightfully remarked that as Thomas touched the wounds of Christ's body, his own wounds and disbelief were healed.

The invitation for Thomas to be in touch with the wounds of Christ's Body involves a risk, the risk of putting aside his own sufferings for a moment, but it is the risk of a trusting friendship. It is that trust and friendship which heals Thomas, for this twin discovers that all along, Christ was calling him not to be a servant, but a friend. He respects Thomas' sufferings so much that as the Risen Lord, He would join this disciple's wounds to His own for the salvation of the world. St. Paul would later leave us astonished by making this point even more bluntly. Our sufferings, he tells us, "make up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ." Imagine: the one Thomas calls "my Lord and my God" wants us to be partners in saving the world. That is what the Risen Lord reveals in Thomas. There is a certain irony that Christ especially chose one who was tempted not to show up, to show us the way. But it only highlights that Thomas was born for this day.

That same Risen Lord now stands in our midst. He knows the sufferings each of us brings and which we bring collectively here today. Hearts are heavy with a gnawing fear about what will happen to our Church, our diocese, our parishes. Disappointment mixes with anger and disgust at the very thought that some who were consecrated to serve would ever think of molesting a child. We know the shame and humiliation of public ridicule and scorn, leaving heartsick and crushed

any of us who love the Church and know how much good it has done in the past and continues to do in our time.

All of that is in this room today, as it was on that evening for Thomas and the others, but so is the Risen Lord, and He knows our sufferings.

Maybe like Thomas we have been from time to time tempted just not to show up. In fact, a few pastors have told me that some of their parishioners have made that decision, concluding that it is all just too much to take. But just as He did with Thomas, the Risen Lord invites them and all of us back and, yes, to take the risk of putting aside for a moment our pain to touch the wounds of His Body. The wounds I am talking about are the wounds of those harmed in this horrible chapter of our history, the children who were abused.

Last February, while waiting to board a plane, a young boy, about 10 or 11, suddenly came up to me and handed me a small 2x4 inch card. “What’s this?” I asked.

“It’s my business card,” he fearlessly announced.

“Well, thanks,” I stammered.

“Yeah, I thought you should have it,” he said. And then, as abruptly as he had approached me, he spun on his heels and dashed away. I turned the card over and all it said was “Ben, the best kid in the world.”

As I boarded the plane, it hit me. It is that spunk and verve, that enthusiasm for life and innocent confidence which we find so endearing and charming about kids, that allowed this youngster to come up and hand his business card to a total stranger, dressed in clerical garb. And yet, it was that same innocence, gusto and eagerness for all that life has to offer which was crushed and taken away from young people who were abused.

We have to understand that; we have to see that in our time, this is a gaping wound in the Body of Christ that needs our touching attention. The temptation, of course, is to be so preoccupied with our own wounds. Christ is not indifferent to them. But He needs us to make the priority the

healing of these other wounds, and be in touch with these other wounds in His Body, trusting that as we make this the priority, He in His own way will heal theirs and ours. Yes, that is a risk, but it is the risk of a trusting friendship, and I am convinced that this is the heart of the renewal Christ is calling the Church to in our time. “No longer do I call you slaves, but friends,” grown-up friends. He is calling us to be adults, partnering with Him in joining our sufferings to His for the salvation of the world.

Like Thomas, He invites us to resist the urge to flee, to tell each other “you are on your own,” “I am out of here,” and believe instead that as astonishing as it may seem, that we were born for this day.

We need to do this for ourselves, but even more so for those who come after us. That is why I wanted these schoolchildren to be here today. I wanted their presence to serve as a reminder of something we already know: They are watching us. They are watching to see how we handle this moment. They are watching to see if we really trust in this Risen Lord, and will be true, as we claim to be, to His friendship and all the risks that go with believing that we were born for this day.

We have a lot to teach these young people. There will be moments in their lives when they will face the pain of human life, through their own missteps or other misfortunes. Oh, yes, we have the benefit of a rich tradition to help teach them, beautifully articulated in doctrines and dogmas that enduringly sustain us. But how we respond to this particular challenge and others like it in our time will teach them the most.

As I noted earlier, we begin this new chapter on this feast of the Great Gregory. He too lived in demanding times, with vexing problems from within and without. Roaming hordes of barbarians terrorized citizens and created chaos in the wake of the fall of the Roman Empire. A bureaucracy of insiders in the governing structures of society and the Church, left over from the days of that same empire, were resistant to the renewal this successor of Peter sought to bring.

Maybe it is because of this situation that Gregory described the Church as the dawn. “The dawn” he wrote, “suggests that while the night is over, it does not yet proclaim the full light of day. While it dispels the darkness and welcomes the light, it holds both of them, the one mixed with the other, as it were.”

What an encouraging metaphor for us as we take up the work of the Church in our day. Yes, there are shadows of uncertainty around us, and I can tell you I have a whole lot of questions for which I have no answers. But, as the poet Hopkins puts it, this darkness belongs to “the last lights off the black west,” and they are giving way as “the brown brink eastward springs.” Christ the Risen One, whom we call the Dayspring, stands with us, inviting us to trust Him, inviting us to be His adult friends and partners in saving the world in our time, inviting us to believe that we were born for this day.

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