

4.22.18 4 Sunday Easter B 2018

April 22

Frazees/Callaway

I have a friend who lives in his head. For him, the body is an unfortunate necessity to keep his mind alive. If we are traveling together in my car I can ask him, "Is it warm enough for you?" He will always answer, "Huh. I don't know." Food for him is a requirement to remain alive, but there is no like or dislike of it. Same with water. Bathing...lets' not even talk about it.

I am no longer talking about my friend, but let's push this into the arena of faith. If only the mind matters, then how is one saved? By knowledge.

Pope Francis has been warning us about two ancient heresies that are making a resurgence. We talked about Pelagianism last week. This is to believe that we can attain heaven by our own will and strength. It is to believe we don't need Jesus; Jesus didn't redeem us; he merely gave us a good example. Our job as Christians is to earn heaven.

The second ancient heresy is Gnosticism. It comes from the Greek work *Gnosis*, which can be translated "knowledge" or "good at knowing." This is the religion of knowledge. It is the religion of knowing everything there is to know and taking pride in it. It is a smug self-assurance that you know the right things to know and you know them uniquely. Again, we don't need Jesus. The salvation of the soul is merely in the possession of a quasi-intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of magic formulae indicative of that knowledge. Gnostics were "people who knew," and their knowledge at once constituted to them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know.

What does Pope Francis see today? He sees Christians who have an interior vision of salvation. A vision which, marked by personal conviction or feeling of being united to God, does not take into account the need to accept, heal and renew our relationships with others and with the created world. This Christian does not need the Church.

You have heard this disposition. For example: Why would I come to church and think about golf when I can be on the golf course thinking about God? Even if someone is half joking, Pope Francis is asking: Is there peril in this mindset?

In contrast, Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd. A shepherd who knows his sheep and calls them by name. A shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus does not live in his head—he lives for others. He always lives for others.

In contrast, St. John reminds us of the love the Father has for us, that we may be called children of God. Love is not an intellectual concept. To be a child implies an on-going, intense, intimate relationship. St. John says that we shall be like God, and one day we shall see God as he is. God is not a brain floating in the heavens. God is Father filled with love and mercy.

It is love and mercy that healed the crippled man. Peter reminds the leaders and elders that Jesus Christ was crucified for the redemption of the world. If we can be saved by just knowing the right stuff, then there would have been no need for Jesus to sacrifice himself. St. Luke reminds us that there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven, given to the human race, by which we are to be saved.

My friend who lives in his head? On Wednesday morning I was next to him when a helping hand was offered to a brother in need. My friend bowed his head and tears began to stain the pages of the book he was reading. He is not so much in his head anymore. He knows the temperature of a room and he believes that Jesus Christ has knit us together as one body.

To know things about theology and law, to study the mysteries of the universe, ought to lead us to one place: into the arms of a heavenly Father who loves us. So, we understand that we cannot love God very well if we do not love one another.