

Homily
3AdventA
Dec. 10/11, 2016
St. Bernard Church, Tulsa
Deacon Tim Sullivan

For 13 years, I've been Executive Director of Catholic charitable organizations and so was in a position to interview and hire new employees. During some of that time, I was in New York, where the laws on religious discrimination were more complicated, so I had to be careful in talking about religion during job interviews.

As a safe way of at least getting in the neighborhood of religion, I started asking people who had applied for jobs this question: "How do you determine the meaning and purpose of your life?"

Most of the time, people just stared back at me, as if that was something they had never thought about.

I think it's a good question. If I asked each of you, "What is the meaning and purpose of your life?" how would you answer? How would I answer that same question?

If I asked John the Baptist this question, I know for sure how he would answer. It's clear from this evening's Gospel.

Think about it. John's the man. People have been coming out in huge numbers to see him preaching in the desert. He has his own disciples. He's widely known as a prophet. Some people think he might be the Messiah. He's a celebrity.

But here he is in prison. And instead of thinking about himself, and what could happen to him, he sends his disciples to Jesus to check him out, because he's been hearing stories about Jesus. He wants to know whether Jesus is the Messiah.

So, despite his popularity, John is humble, and he knows his mission. His mission is to identify the Messiah, the one who is going to come after him. And he is totally consumed with that mission, and nothing else.

If we believe in Jesus, what is our mission and purpose?

At the Transfiguration, when Jesus went up on the mountain and was seen conversing with Moses and Elijah, you might remember that a voice came from a cloud and said: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Ok. Then our mission and purpose in life is to listen to Jesus. That raises a question: "Are we listening?" "Are we listening to him?"

Well, how does Jesus speak to us?

In 3 ways:

- The Bible
- The teachings of the Church
- Jesus communicates through the Holy Spirit the unique meaning and purpose of life for each one of us
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We should be focused on these 3 ways that Jesus is speaking to us.

For many of us, our lives are so busy and we are so bombarded by various forms of communication that we really have to focus on giving Jesus time to speak to us. We need to be purposeful about setting aside time to study Scripture, to know the teachings of the Church and to have enough quiet to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

In one of the Vatican II documents, we get an important clue about our mission and purpose. It says that Jesus reveals to all human beings our vocation, the purpose of our lives. It says that the purpose of our lives is to make a sincere gift of ourselves to Jesus and to others.

This means that, like Jesus, we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. For John the Baptist, that meant prison and martyrdom. For us, it might mean getting out of our comfort zone and living our faith in a more intentional way. It might mean putting up with criticism and ridicule.

There's a Catholic writer, Thomas Merton, who gives us an image which I think is helpful when we try to think about the meaning and purpose of our lives.

He says each of us should want only to be an instrument of God's will. We should only want to be like a window through which God's love, God's mercy and God's truth shine on the world. We want the light of God's love to shine through us without any obstruction being created by any selfishness on our part.

To me, that image is very helpful. To stop and think in every situation, "Lord, I know you are here, and that you want to shine the light of your grace through me to other people who are present. Let me be your window, just a window, and to let your light pass through me without any interference, and touch other people in whatever way you want to touch them."

Every one of you, every person in this church tonight, was created by God for a specific meaning and purpose. To follow the teachings in the Bible and of the Church, yes, but for even more than that.

Each of you was created to serve God and to serve others in a specific way that no one else on earth can do. Psalm 139 says that God foresaw all our actions; in his book all are written down; our days were shaped, before a single one came to be.

The key to life is to know the specific meaning and purpose of our life, and to live it out faithfully.

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”