

## **The Sunday Before Remembrance Day 2020 (Trinity22)**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“For I came down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.” (St. John 6.38)

Today’s Gospel reading is a portion of what the Lord Jesus told the people who came looking for Him the day after the feeding of the five thousand: remember that? He took five barley loaves and two fish and gave thanks to God, and gave them to His disciples to distribute to the large crowd that was gathered. Well, the next day, many from that crowd went looking for Him. In fact, they crossed the Sea of Galilee and went to Capernaum where He was; and, it was not long before He was speaking to them about things that really matter – matters of the heart – matters of faith.

The Jews wanted to know what His work was, and they recalled how their ancestors had eaten the manna (the bread from heaven), when they travelled in the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised land. In their history that miraculous provision of bread was connected with the work of Moses. So, they asked Jesus, “What work do you perform?” Moses gave our forefathers manna in the wilderness – what is your work?

Jesus responded by reminding them that the manna was not supplied by Moses but by God. He said, “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”. That struck a chord with the crowd, and they immediately replied, “Sir, give us this bread always”. That’s when Jesus spoke the words which begin today’s Gospel: “I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst”.

As part of that conversation which was about spiritual satisfaction and sustenance, and ultimately eternal life – the bread of life – Jesus talked to the people about His work. He said, “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”. Then He added, “This is the will of Him that

sent Me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day”.

So, in short, the Lord’s work is to do His Father’s will; and the Father’s will is that we would be saved – saved from the powers of sin and death and hell. There is, of course, a lot to talk about here, but let’s just focus on the first part of Jesus’ words: “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me”.

What exactly is this ‘will’ He was talking about – “not my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” -- the Father’s will? The Greek word that is used translates as “God's ‘preferred-will’ -- His ‘best-offer’ to people, which can be accepted or rejected”. This is what the Lord Jesus was saying: my work is to accept and to do my Father’s will. And, that will, as you all will see soon enough, involves much humiliation and suffering and death, as well as resurrection and victory and ascension and glory. That Divine will which I came to do (or as we now say, ‘to action’ – required sacrifice.

As we reflect on this idea of the Divine will, we are bound to think about our own will – the human will. One modern scholar speaks of the will in terms of a capacity to make decisions: “The human will refers to the human capacity to actively decide what to do instead of reacting automatically to stimuli.” Another scholar uses the word ‘desire’: “The will is the faculty of the mind that selects, at the moment of decision, a desire among the various desires present”.

As Christians – the children of God – our desire is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in His way. Our desire is to join our will to God’s will – to keep His commandments and to be obedient to His Word. To do this, we know that our hearts must be changed, and so we are daily seeking the help of the Holy Spirit.

Accepting the will of God, and doing it, is no easy task. At times, we struggle to know what His will is. At other times, we struggle to accept it and to act on it. Why? Because we are fallen creatures, susceptible to the temptations that come outside us and within us – temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. In order to want to know what God’s will is; in order to be willing to seek His will for our lives, and in order to accept that holy will and to do it, and to keep doing it, we need God’s help – the help provided in His Word and in the sacraments, such

as the Holy Communion; the help of His Spirit; and the help of His Church, including the fellowship of other Christians.

“I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him that sent Me” – even when that Divine will involved real uncertainty, fear, humiliation, mocking, pain and suffering; even when it involved death on a cross.

I wonder if these words of Jesus were on the minds of the Bailey family when they gave the processional cross in memory of their son, Harold. I don't doubt that they were. Here's the story, as researched and written by Debbie and Barb MacDonald. You can find it in the beautiful red album at the back of the church, entitled 'Lest We Forget'. The story goes like this:

“Harold was born on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1923, the son of George and Mary Bailey of Sunny Brae. He grew up on Elm Street with his three sisters: Pat, Audrey and Shirley. Some of you will remember Shirley — she was, by her married name, Shirley Strugnell. Anyway, Harold was a member of St. George's Scout Troop and he went to Moncton High School.

But there is a twist coming: his military service records show that a different birth date. According to his military file, he was born on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1922. How was this error made? Well, in order to join, Harold lied about his age. Fast forward three years: on D-Day, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944, Harold (then 21 years of age) landed at Normandy in France. He was an infantry soldier with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders. Having survived the initial attack on Juno Beach, Harold and his platoon moved further inland, on June 7<sup>th</sup>, to the villages of Buron and Authie. There, just after noon hour, they encountered the 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division which was being commanded by Colonel Kurt Meyer. The 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzers, at that point in the war, were primarily made up of Hitler Youth, who were full of Nazi ideology. They were new to the battle and eager to prove themselves, exerting a reckless courage.

The long and short of that bloody day was that the North Nova Scotian Platoons became overwhelmed in the German counter attack at the village of Authie. More than 120 Canadians were taken prisoner and herded in groups to the panzers' regimental HQ at the Abbaye d'Ardenne. However, many of them never made it to the Abbaye. With their hands tied behind their backs, and many wounded from the fighting, they were randomly shot by the S.S. en route. In some cases the

bodies of these murdered Canadians were thrown into the roadways to be shredded by passing vehicles. Those who did make it to the Abbaye courtyard were interrogated; and at nightfall another 23 were executed. Somewhere within this group of prisoners was Harold Weldon Bailey.

Eventually, word came back to Moncton – to the Baileys home on Elm Street – that Harold was missing in action; and then, that he had been killed in action. And then, in the weeks and months following, George and Mary and the Harold's sisters began to grieve their loss. And that's where their story connected with Jesus' story. "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of Him that sent Me".

Whenever we come up against a hardship, sickness, a tragedy, a situation that requires sacrifice, we have a choice. We can accept or reject it. As those who have been given that capacity – that will – we have that choice. But as Christians, that choice should be to apply our will in the way of the Lord. It should be to seek, not our will, but God's will – even when sacrifice is required – even when there is a cross.

As Christians, we are able to do this by faith – by faith in Christ Jesus Who has defeated the powers of darkness by His Death and Resurrection. This is the point of today's Lesson from the Book of Revelation. Because of Jesus' Sacrifice and Victory, all things are being renewed. Death's mightiest powers have done their worst and they have been defeated; so, God is continuing on with His work, now, of healing and redemption.

I believe that George and Mary's decision – the exercise of their will – to place the processional cross at St. George's, in spite of the circumstances surrounding Harold's death, was an act of faith. It was a sign of acceptance and trust that God's power is stronger than all the powers of darkness. It was a way of joining their sorrow – their sacrifice – to the sacrifice of God. Their son died, and God's credibility was in giving His own Son over to suffering and death for the life of the world.

In this pandemic and following it, we have and will be called to make sacrifices. As Christians, every hardship is an opportunity to grow in our faith. We need to be changed – my selfish heart needs renovation – and the Lord calls us to new life

through the cross. May we go forward believing that His will is perfect and that He will never leave us or forsake us.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, he <sub>son</sub> and the Holy Ghost...