

Homily on Rom 8,12-17

October 28, 2017

Intro: To understand St. Paul, it is important to know that for him, a human being is composed of three elements: flesh, mind, and spirit.

Flesh does not mean our body, but refers to our preoccupation with earth oriented tendencies. It is the drive that makes us concerned exclusively with our pleasure, our appearance, our self-preservation. It leads to a sinful turning away from God and God's other creatures. Consequently, flesh leads us to death.

Mind is our ability to reason that life is more than pleasure; we need to be rational in our search for meaning. Mind leads us to some commitment to our community, to the world around us, without which we cannot survive.

Spirit is our drive to transcend our self-concern, to give ourselves to others in love, and to loving service of our neighbor. Ultimately, it is spirit which orients us to God's Holy Spirit and the things of God. Only by the Spirit enlivening our spirit can we come to understand and commit to the things of God and so be saved for eternal life in God.

Perhaps each of you can find in your own flesh this tendency to self, to placing yourself first to the discounting of others and your own best interests. Or you can find your mind planning a good community in which you would be rewarded for the good you do. Or you can find in your spirit a tendency to give yourself in love, to caring for yourself and your world beyond your own interests, to know and fall in love with God. If you understand all this, then you know your need of God's help to overcome your passions and your calculations to find true meaning in life.

Romans:

In the first seven chapters of Romans Paul describes man under the domination of the flesh, even to the point of turning the Law of God into a self-serving, or self-protecting device. This is man under the influence of sin, original and personal. Now today in chapter eight Paul begins to speak of the deliverance from the law of the flesh by the law of the Spirit of God.

Here is what he writes: If you live by the flesh, you will get the reward of the flesh, which is death. But if your spirit lives by the Spirit of God given you in faith and baptism, then you are children of God. The Spirit has so united you with the love of Christ found in his death and resurrection, that you receive the outpouring of the Spirit in baptism and become, in Christ's Body, children of God. You are not a son or daughter in the same sense that Jesus was the Son of God, but you receive a spirit of adoption into Christ. If you are a son or daughter you are now enabled to call God Abba, the intimate Aramaic title for a personal father. Abba is the term in which Jesus called out to his Father in his agony in the garden, now yours when you pray "Our Father."

To understand what Paul means, you have to enter the image of adoption. Suppose you are an infant rescued from the garbage can in which a frightened teenage mother has deposited you. You are rescued and taken to an orphanage, where you are cared for in a caring but regimented way along with other orphans. Then a loving couple adopts you. You are given nourishment, your own clothes and bed, a secure home, education. You are cared for, and loved for who you are. You gain an identity as their son or daughter, you gain a history of your family, and you gain a future as their heir. You have been elevated into a rich human life.

This is what Paul means by your being an adopted son of God. Baptized into Christ, you now have a Father, a heavenly Father, and you can call him, "Daddy." God is now your nourishment, your security, your educator. With this new identity you have new eyes, and a new heart. You are empowered to seek the things of God rather than the things of the flesh. And in so doing you will inherit the eternal life of the Risen Christ.

But this life in the Spirit is not "easy street." If you are baptized into Christ you are baptized into his death. You too, must live as he lived, a life of self-giving which will involve suffering with him for the salvation of our world. If Christ had to challenge himself and others to live for his Father's justice and peace, so will you.

If you fear this kind of self-giving life, then you must pray to the Spirit of Christ to deliver you from your flesh and your mind, so you may find, even in this life, the good news of His Holy Spirit.