

“Have We Not All The One Father?”

Homily of October 30, 2005

by Fr. Brian Timoney

First of all, I would like to say a word of thanks to all of you. Last Sunday, asked your prayers for one of my younger brothers, who had had a heart attack. I spoke to him yesterday morning and he is doing fine, thank you. I appreciate your prayers.

I do not usually use the Old Testament as the basis for a homily. And the reason is very simple. It has been superseded by the New Testament. The Old Law no longer applies, except for those parts explicitly proclaimed by Jesus, the Ten Commandments and the summing up of all the law and the prophets in the two great commandments, Love God and Love one another. But the passage from the prophet Malachi that we read a few minutes ago is so powerful that I decided to comment on it today.

Malachi says, “Have we not all the one Father? Has not the one God created us? Why then do we break faith with each other, violating the covenant of our fathers?” He is lamenting the lack of faithfulness. These people had come back from exile, back from Babylon, had experienced God’s great love for them, God’s care for them, and for awhile they were on a great spiritual high. But now they were beginning to be unfaithful to God. When you read the entire passage, he spells it out. I do hope you read the whole thing. There are only three chapters in Malachi. It’s very, very short. You don’t know where to find it? OK. Then open Matthew. You know the gospel of Matthew. You know where to find that. Go one book back. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. There you will find it.

He spells out what he is angry about, some very particular abuses. For example, he is very angry with the men he says are divorcing their wives and marrying younger ones, and particularly because they were foreigners. That, for him, was the utmost, that they should go and marry outside their own people. And then he castigates the priests of the temple for their ignorance and their self-indulgence and their greed. And their greed was demonstrated by the fact that they were offering up as sacrifices blind and lame animals. You see, they were cheaper. So, this was disrespecting God, as far as Malachi was concerned. And he has a great sentence, talking about them offering up these lame and blind animals. He says, “Present that to your governor and see if he will accept it or welcome you.” God is not being respected the way a civil ruler would be respected. “Present that to your governor.”

Is that challenge still valid? Yes, I think so. Do we really reverence God as we should? Some of the things we have been asked to do recently, with regard to the Mass and so on, are all about

reverence, about being faithful to God, about being reverent. For example, you are asked when you come up to Holy Communion, just before you receive, to bow your head slightly in reverence. That's what it is all about. Well, to kind of build on what Malachi asks, that question, present that to your governor, if you were invited to dinner by our governor (Some of you might politely decline.) but if you were to accept, would you be there on time? And would you be dressed appropriately for that occasion? I think those questions are still valid, aren't they?

Then Malachi goes on to express his anger with those who defraud the hired man of his wages, those who defraud widows and orphans, and those who turn aside from a stranger. Again, words spoken two thousand four hundred years ago are asking us to examine our consciences. As a society, are we being faithful to one another, to this community that we share? Are we being faithful to those most in need, to the homeless, those who are right on the verges of poverty, to children who go hungry to bed at night, to strangers? Are we being faithful to them, a question I think we can all ask. The common theme of all these questions of Malachi and the questions put to ourselves, the common theme is "Why do we break faith with one another, violating the covenant of our fathers?" That old covenant was expressed by "I will be your God and you will be my people." Men, women and children were bound together by their commitment to that one God. They were one people, because of their worship of the great God, Yahweh. Now, for us, that covenant has passed, BUT a new covenant has been sealed in the blood of Christ. And it has been effected in us by the water of Baptism. By baptism, we have entered into a new relationship with God, a new covenant, and we have been bound into a new people, into a new family with Jesus Christ as our brother. It is through him that we have now become one, brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are asked by this covenant to try to live the gospel ideal to the best of our ability, to be faithful, faithful to God, faithful to one another as a people. Yes, we do need each other. I need you to be faithful and you need me to be faithful because we are a community. Now, of course, there is personal sin, but personal sin is also sin against the community because it means that the faithfulness to God that the community owes is in some way lessened. Or, to put it in another way, the level of holiness has been decreased in some way by our personal sin, that holiness that should be in the whole community. So, we are responsible for one another and to each other. We are asked to be faithful to one another. And that is why, at the very beginning of every Mass, we ask pardon of God for our sins. We confess to one another our sinfulness. And that is why the communal penance services that we have, and we will have one now during Advent, why they are so wonderful and so powerful, as an expression of our regret that we have not been as faithful to God and to one another as we are called to be.

Faithfulness to one another, in our Christian community, ultimately means living out the two great commandments, Love God and Love one another. Now those two commandments are all over the Old Testament. But Jesus has added something wonderful and something powerful to them. He said, "Love one another as I have loved you." That's now the marker, "as Jesus has loved us." Unconditionally, totally, no exceptions. That's the level that he asks us to try to rise to, "Love one another as I have loved you." And he goes on to say that the measure of our love for God is measured by our love for one another. You know the passage very well. Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was naked and you

clothed me. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters you do for me.” As individuals and as a community bound together by our common faithfulness to Christ, surely we should be pushing Christ’s agenda. And, without question, his agenda was concern for those most in need. And so, we come back to the great question that Malachi asked, “Have we not then one Father? Has not the one God created us?” Amen.