

Homily  
LentB 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
St. Bernard Church  
March 22, 2015

In today's Gospel, Jesus brings up a principle which runs throughout the entire Bible. We'll call it "the seed principle." There's a subtitle: "what it means to be a Christian man."

The Bible brings up the seed principle right at the beginning, in the story of creation in the Book of Genesis: in Chapter 1:

"Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it.' And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was."

Next we'll look at what God promised Abraham, also in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 22:

"Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand on the seashore, and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies."

In today's Gospel, from the Gospel of John, Jesus explains the seed principle:

"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

It's obvious from this that Jesus himself is going to live out the seed principle. He is going to die, and from his death he will produce much fruit.

In the First Letter of John, Chapter 3, verse 9, we are told:

"No one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God."

The seed that is in us is Jesus. If we truly believe in him and want to be like him, we will also be seeds. With God's grace, we will sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. And our sacrifices will bear fruit.

In many ancient paintings of Jesus, there is a pomegranate in a corner of the painting. Why is it in the painting? The pomegranate, which is filled with many, many seeds and brilliant red pulp, is a symbol of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ.

It's worth mentioning here that there is a saying in the Catholic Church that goes back to the early days in which the Church was so brutally persecuted: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." You and I are experiencing today the fruit of the sacrifices of those who died for their Christian faith over 2,000 years ago.

What does this have to do with Christian men?

Well, without getting too deeply into biology, most of us know that men, like the vegetation and the fruit described in the creation story in the Book of Genesis, are seed-carriers. This is more than just a biological accident. The carrying of seed by men is part of our identity as Christian men.

When the Bible describes the respective roles of men and women, men are given the role of Jesus, like the groom, and women are given the role of the Church, like the bride. What is expected of the men in their relationship with their wives?

To answer this, we have to look at how Jesus carried out his mission and identity as a groom.

First of all, when did Jesus profess his wedding vows?

At the Last Supper. Jesus promised to give his entire self as a groom to the Church as his bride when he said these words, "This is my body which shall be given up for you." Then, the very next day, he fulfilled his wedding vows by giving up his life for the Church, his bride.

St. Paul makes it clear that men are to model themselves after Jesus in the way they relate to their wives. He writes, in the Letter to the Ephesians:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her..."

So, Christian men, at their wedding, every day of their married life and especially when they are making love to their wives, they need to be saying, at the very deepest level:

"This is my body which shall be given up for you. I love you and will sacrifice my life for you from this moment until the day I die. And if God blesses us with a child, I will love and sacrifice my life for that child and all of our children until the day I die."

For most Christian husbands, the seed of life will bear fruit, fruit in the form of offspring, of children. And just as each of us is made in the image of God, so each child of a husband and wife, if they are blessed with fertility, is made in the image of his or her parents.

And, to go one step farther, the seed of life is to be accompanied by the seed of faith. The faith that provided the grace, the strength, to sustain the husband and wife in their commitment to one another, is passed on to their children, and to their children, and so on.

While a father provides for the material needs of his family, he does not have an obligation to indulge his family with everything they might want. Indeed, he may have to sacrifice his popularity within the family to challenge his family to lead an authentically Christian life. His main priority is to protect the spiritual well-being of his family.

A man does not have to be married to live out the seed principle. Single men, and especially our priests, can and do lead lives of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. And, it should be obvious, that women also are called to sacrifice themselves for others, and they do so, but in different ways.

I want to close with a quote from Pope Francis when he offered a reflection on the mission of St. Joseph, whose feast we observed just this past Thursday:

“How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church? By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God’s presence and receptive to God’s plans, and not simply to his own...Joseph is a protector because he is able to hear God’s voice and be guided by his will; and for this reason he is all the more sensitive to the persons entrusted to his safekeeping. In him, dear friends, we learn how to respond to God’s call, readily and willingly, but we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect all of creation.”