

Lenten Retreat

Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It was the Theme of the Lenten retreat which Fr Irenaeus preached at St. Dominic's. He came up from Grenada full of joy in the Holy Spirit, breaking out into song as is his habit, sprinkling his talks with jokes and testimonies from his parish life.

Sin deprives us of the righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit he warned. It is the only thing which can separate us from God, while the only way to serve God is by living righteous lives. Being members of various church groups does not necessarily mean that we are serving God; it may help us to do so, but if we are attending mass and no change is taking place in our lives, then we are deceiving ourselves.

He mentioned the three agents of deceit: (1) Satan

(2) Sin

(3) Self.

Satan presents himself as one who can make us see clearly. He conned Adam and Eve into believing God didn't want them eating of the forbidden fruit because He knew that should they eat they would become like Gods. Adam and Eve fell for his lie and only see what became of it. Satan always has a better way, so he would like us to believe, and if we are not listening to God's views, then we align ourselves to the views of Satan and the world.

Sin is always in competition with the word of God and we must beware, for sin causes us distress. Obedience, on the other hand brings us blessings. The devil never comes to us when we are committing sin; it is when we are striving to live righteous lives that he comes with his temptations.

As for self, the third agent of deception, Father urged us to choose to act as the Christians we say we are. The devil never tells us of the consequences of what he's tempting us to do, but when we give in to his temptations, we reap what we sow.

On the subject of peace he announced that Jesus offers us peace but not the type that the world offers; true peace comes only from Jesus and our hopes are directly related to our being at peace. As long as

we hope for the wrong thing we shall never be at peace. Hope should mean our reliance on God's blessings and provision; it should be rooted in God, remembering what He has already done for us. We read the bible and see what He did for His people and it deepens our faith, for if He did it for others He can also do it for us. Fr. spoke of our expectations:

1. Natural Expectations: If others continue to show us who they are we should believe them.
2. Sinful expectations: When Paul was arrested by the Jews, Felix was hoping Paul would pay him moneys, so that he, Felix, would let him go free.
3. Impossible expectation: As in the case of Abraham where he was promised by God that he would be the father of nations, though he was over a hundred years and his wife almost as old, plus being barren.

Joy, Fr. explained, is gladness of heart. Unfortunately, we usually rely on people or things to make us joyous but that should not be the case. When we depend on these external things our joy can always be taken away, the devil comes with his temptations and we find ourselves making foolish choices. To have lasting joy we need to take a new approach to our lives; our joy should be dependent on internal factors. We must be self confident but our confidence should not be a prideful one. Pride is evident when we are:

1. Overly ambitious.
2. Evil heart
3. Very worldly
4. Power seeking
5. Self-righteous.

We need to ditch pride and work with what we have, making the best of ourselves so as to be confident. We should be confident that God will provide us with lasting joy as we make our mark as His witnesses, until He calls us home. His directions are more important than what people say or think, therefore we should make sure that our attitude to life is similar to Jesus' attitude and compare ourselves

not to others, but to Jesus. Ignoring God's directions is a bad idea which tends to get us in trouble plus, ignoring God's directions will leave us lacking His gift of joy.

The good news is, we do not have to continue living lives in opposition to Christ's example, we can immediately begin striving to be able to stand with confidence before the Son of God.

On Friday, the last day of the retreat, Father's talk was directed mostly to the youth. He advised that *being* the right person is a prerequisite for finding the right person. Some prefer to be a fake somebody than to be a real nobody but people who are fake are not usually up to any good purpose. We need to get rid of our fake-ness, stop pretending and be true to ourselves. In order to be the right person we need to be:

1. Interested in God's word so as not to be easily swayed by emotions and desires.
2. Love and appreciate those around us especially members of our family.
3. Focus on improving ourselves and make the best of a bad situation. Focus on improving ourselves when there is something not right in our home; the one thing we will always have is ourselves.
4. You cannot do evil to accomplish good.

God wants to guide and enable us to live righteous lives. He wants to enable us to live lives of peace and joy.

All in all the retreat was not only informative, but also entertaining. Father Irenaeus' talks were appreciated and enjoyed by all, leaving us spiritually richer for having attended the retreat.