

INSPIRED WORD

January 11, 2017

EXHORTATION

Before we get started tonight, let's surrender any worries, any burdens and anything else that would keep us from fully entering into the deep praise and worship of God. Just turn over all of those things to the Lord. At one praise and worship group that I used to attend, they used to say, "Picture Jesus walking around in our midst with a great big trash bag, like one of those black Hefty bags. As He walks by, throw into the bag all of the things that would hinder us from deeply praising and worshiping God."

PRAYER

Lord, we turn over to You all of the worries, burdens and stresses of the day that we came with tonight. Not that You are going to take it all away, Lord, but help us to know that You are with us, even if we are not feeling well or have things going on in our lives. We thank You and give You praise, Lord!

Tonight we are going to start off with praise and worship, and then we will have a teaching by Denise on "Thrive – We Were Meant to Thrive".

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18: 20: Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there with them."

SCRIPTURE

This past weekend we had the display and presentation of all the Eucharistic Miracles and they were powerful. It brought to my mind this scripture in the **Song of Songs: Chapter 8 – Beloved:** Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned. **(Verses 6- 7)**

PRAYER

Jesus, give us the grace to use this moment, a tough moment, to come to our senses and go to the Father again. In humility, help us to see our value, not in our accomplishments nor to judge ourselves by our failures, but in our relationship to our Creator, our Father, and friends. Help us to be strengthened in prayer and love and to seek His face and seek relationships. God sees through us all of the important things that matter to Him, so may we press on and press in as we go deeper in our love of Him.

SCRIPTURE

Zephaniah 3: 16 – 20: On that day, it shall be said to Jerusalem: The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a Warrior Who gives victory; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you in His love; He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. “I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all of your oppressors at that time. I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at that time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes”, says the Lord.

SCRIPTURE

Something that keeps going through my mind are the readings of the Church for yesterday and today – the gospel. It was about how the people in the synagogue in Capernaum were amazed by the teachings of Jesus. Jesus did not teach them as the scribes had taught them, but instead, He taught as One having authority. (**Reference: Mark 1: 22**)

TEACHING / SCRIPTURE / IMAGE

Denise speaking: I would call this more of a sharing, rather than a teaching, but after that last song, it is giving praise to the Lord. It was on a Wednesday night a couple of months ago that we sang the opening song of “Thrive.” For some reason that particular night, I could not think past these words: “We were made for so much more than ordinary lives, it is time for us to more than just survive, we were made to thrive.” I asked myself this question: Am I surviving, or am I thriving? Am I living just an ordinary life, or am I growing and flourishing?” That night I thought that the majority of the time I was just surviving. When I got home that night I read the meaning of the word, **thrive**, in the dictionary. The main definition it is to grow bigger. I don’t think I have ever used the word, **bigger**, to describe anything I have done, so at that point I wasn’t going to look into this any deeper. I thought that if I did pursue this meaning of the word, I might feel compelled or even feel guilty to do more in my life.

But the words of that song kept going through my head for the next couple of weeks. So I finally said, “Okay, I surrender; I will look deeper into what it means to thrive spiritually.” Pediatricians sometimes use the phrase “failure to thrive” for babies who don’t gain weight, or develop or grow as they should. Sometimes I think it helps if we look at the opposite meaning of the word ‘thrive’. So the opposite of the word ‘thrive’ is to decrease, to cease, fail, shrink, shrivel, stop, recede and so forth. I could look at those words and say pretty confidently that I am not there. But is surviving the best that I can do? What does it mean ‘to thrive’? To thrive is to communicate growth and movement; it means something is changing and expanding. When something thrives, it means that it is healthy and getting stronger. It means to flourish, prosper, shine and increase. To flourish, is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruits in season and its leaves are not withered. It prospers and it thrives.

Psalm 1: 1 – 3: “Blessed is he whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” To thrive is to dig into a root and to understand God and yourself more; to dig into the root is to dig into the Word of God. God gave us all of the tools that we need to thrive; He gave us His Word, He gave us His Son, so that we may come to know Him, and come to know how to be like Him. Iris grow and become strong only when they are continually cultivated. They need a deep and abundant root system to withstand abusive winds, and an arid climate. This can pertain to blades of grass too. They need to be watered often enough so that the water soaks down into the ground; that is what causes the roots to go down deep. If the water doesn't soak in, then roots stay near the surface and the blades of grass won't thrive.

So we need to go deep into the surface that God has provided for us, to soak up more water, more of the Lord in order to replenish and refresh ourselves and to bear fruit. That is the point of planting a garden; the gardener prepares the soil, plants the seeds, cares for the plants and does everything possible so that those plants can do what they were created to do – to grow, to produce and to produce abundantly. God wants us to grow, to produce and to prosper. The purpose for producing fruits in our lives is to please our Gardener, to give glory to God. God keeps asking us to stop thinking about what we don't have or can't do, and start thinking about what we do have, what He gave us, and what we can do! It is God Who empowers us and gives us the grace to thrive. God's plan is that we are a blessing to the community in which we live. Once we understand God, to know Him, to really know Him by digging into the root, then we can reach out to others, like the tree branches reaching out to the sun. It is the Spirit of God within us that causes the fruit of the Spirit to come out of us. Thriving focuses outward! Jesus told us to be the light of the world; He wants us to thrive so that the world can see that we are different. When I was thinking about the blades of grass, I had an image of a neighborhood, and in one house are the Christians, maybe next door the atheists, or others. Think of the green and lush lawns at the Christian house. What are the people going to say who are walking or driving by that house? They are probably wondering 'How can that yard look so beautiful?'

I think that Catholics have so many ways of getting to know God; have so many opportunities and special ways of coming closer to God. God wants us to look and act different and to have other people say, “What is different about you?” Some believers may be just the root, they want to go deep and spend a lot of time on the Word of God. They read spiritual books, go to seminars and to retreats to listen to the speakers there. They have faith and trust in God and know that God is in control. But sometimes what happens to that idea is that if God is in control, then He does everything and these people won't reach out to others. There are those who have their causes, they love people and want to help them, and they do all of these wonderful works. But sometimes these people don't have deep roots, only shallow ones.

In **Psalm 1** which I read earlier about the tree, it says that the tree yields its fruit in season. Does this mean that sometimes I am in season, and sometimes I am not?

That sometimes it is okay if I just survive, and that I don't always have to thrive? Here is what God says about thriving in our bad days or in our poor circumstances: In **Genesis 37**, we hear in the account of Jacob that Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. **(Verses 12 – 36)** Joseph was also thrown into prison due to false accusations. **(Genesis 39)** Yet the Bible says that because the Lord was with Joseph, he prospered in everything that he did. **(Genesis 39: 2)** Joseph thrived and prospered because he stayed focused on God and was confident of God's promises and trusted in God's plan for his life.

Also in **Jeremiah 29** God had sent a message to His people who at that time were exiled in Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which you live." **(Verses 5 – 7)** In other words God was telling them to thrive and prosper even in their time of exile because He had not abandoned them. God was still at work in His promises. It is God's desire for us to thrive right here and right now. If we want to thrive, we have to seek ways to know God and seek ways of reaching out and sharing Him with others. This seeking must be a whole-hearted effort.

God also tells us in **Revelation** to be hot or cold, **not lukewarm**. **(Reference: Revelation 3: 15 -16)** To be lukewarm is to act half-heartedly. If we are to thrive, we have to seek God whole-heartedly at all times. God wants us to thrive abundantly! We were meant to dig deep and to reach out to others. We were made to know God and to make Him known to others – that is thriving and growing vigorously!

EXHORTATION

Denise spoke about being whole-hearted and bold in our seeking God. So I think that this is a good opportunity right now to pray for those things. Let's pray that we might be more whole-hearted and bold, surrender to the Lord more fully and with zeal, to make Him known as we reach out to others. In small groups, reach out to those around you and pray for each other – to be more whole-hearted and bold and to know Him in a deeper way and make Him known to others.

EXHORTATION

We are very fortunate as Christians to have a bottomless well of God's love – His everlasting water! So I want to remind everyone that when we are weak or down in spirit, go to the bottomless well of God's love to be strengthened and refreshed again and again.

WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

The word that I keep getting is: **situation**. This means to me that there is a 'situation' that is serious and is causing someone here some consternation and they need prayer for that particular situation. (Praying over the people present who need prayers tonight for various situations.)