

Our first reading this morning is from the Old Testament from the book of Genesis, and we are reading Chapter 41:46-55.

*Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was immeasurable. And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." Then the seven years of Plenty, which were in the land of Egypt. And the seven years of famine began to come. As Joseph had said, the famine was in all the lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, go to Joseph, whatever he says, to you do.*

And our second reading is from the Gospel of Mark Chapter 15: 40-47.

*There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against*

*the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus observed where He was laid.*

And our reading from the Heavenly Doctrines this morning is from the work Heaven and Hell 512(4).

*... to the extent that the Lord flows into our life he does teach us, since to that same extent he kindles our intentions with a love of learning what is true and enlightens our thought so that we know what is true. To the extent that this happens, our deeper reaches are opened and heaven is sown in them. Even beyond this, to that same extent what is divine and heavenly flows into the honest deeds of our moral life and the fair deeds of our civic life and makes them spiritual, since then we are doing them from the Divine because we are doing them for the sake of the Divine. The honest and fair deeds of our moral and civic life that we do from this source are actual effects of spiritual life; and an effect derives all its being from its efficient cause, because the quality of the cause determines the quality of the effect.*

So we are looking at the story of Joseph, of Arimathea and what he represents within us today. And Joseph we see, came to Pilate at the time of preparation. And what that time is of course is that we have the closing of the week of entering into the Jewish Sabbath. And so this time of preparation is that time just prior to the onset of the Sabbath. And therefore it was pressing, in terms of the Lord being on the cross and having died, that he is placed, in his tomb prior to that Sabbath actually coming into being. He had to move quickly because if he didn't the Lord would've been left on the cross for the duration of the Sabbath.

So what about Joseph of Arimathea? Well, we know that he had courage and that he confronted Pilate requesting the body of Jesus. And that Pilate actually granted him, having checked with the centurion that Jesus had in fact died. And so Joseph of Arimathea went forth and he took the body of the Lord from the cross. And having purchased linen, he wrapped the Lord's body in that linen and then placed him in a tomb. And Joseph, we see almost comes out of nowhere. He just arrives on the scene. We know nothing about him through our reading of the gospel. He just appears at this time, at this time of preparation. So it's something not seen before. And as we are coming into the Sabbath, which is at the end of the week within the Jewish marking of time. So he represents something that arises at the closing of something, closing of a state or period.

But of course, every closing is also a new beginning and it represents the movement of one state of life into another. And within this state of life we have described the women watching from a distance and we have there also with these women that they are watching and they see where Jesus is placed. So the women represent a distant, at this point in time at least, a distant knowing. A knowing where the Lord is placed, a deep sense knowing where he is. But it is Joseph that takes center stage in our story today. And we will be looking at the women next week.

And as Joseph takes centre stage we see some wonderful, tender affections being expressed. Affections that are embodied in the actions of Joseph and we see that because Joseph is a male, we are dealing with the things of the understanding. And so what we have here is a new, tender affection which is beginning to govern the understanding. The softness of devotion amidst this incredible pain and grief at the loss of the Lord. And the courage that love inspires as he goes in to Pilate and requests the Lord's body. And when these desires, these tender affections for the Lord, when they are beginning to rule the understanding we see that the actions that proceed from them are filled with mercy and compassion.

Prior to the transition into the new state or actually in the period of transition, that period is a period of preparation. And as with most periods of preparation we see that it's the understanding faculty that does take the leading role. And that understanding faculty here is represented by the male and it is represented by Joseph of Arimathea. And we see that it is the onset of evening, so things aren't so clear.

We only know that things as they are must change. Things need to be done but it is unclear as to exactly what those things are. And this sort of state in which we find illustrated by Joseph, for us, is a sense of loss. It comes with a sense of deep dissatisfaction within and yet there is this continued commitment to remain true to the wisdom that we have. And it is this commitment to that wisdom that has served us well that prepares the way for something much richer in terms of our spiritual life to come into being. This is why Joseph is the centre of our story and why the women are described as being a far off.

I mean, we have all experienced things that happen in life that cause us to become disillusioned. And this disillusionment could be heightened, particularly if we have thought that because we have a faith and that we are committed to progressing in the spiritual life to the best of our ability, that we might be immune somehow from the pain and suffering that life can bring. But

we know, know that painful things, disillusionment and suffering in life can happen to anyone. When we are struggling with life and what it throws our way we might find it difficult to even approach the Word. We struggle to feel connected to it or to see its relevance, somewhat distant, perhaps like the women described here this morning.

At such times we learn from this story that we are to hold to our belief, our belief in the Word and its ability to see us through such times. Such a faith as the product of what we do in those times of relative peace and tranquility and prosperity in our lives, prosperity speaking from a spiritual perspective. For those times our times of preparation, they are times for gathering resources.

And so we have Joseph of Arimathea in a time of preparation as we had Joseph in the Old Testament under Pharaoh in a time also of preparation. Names often repeat themselves throughout the Word. And while from a natural perspective, others may say that this is just a coincidence, we know that Divine Providence governs all things, right down to the very particular things, And that particularly where the Word is concerned, the use of the name Joseph in these two incidences should indicate to us that there is something going on here that has connection. Spiritually these names point us to the fact that that connection exists. Like his namesake in the Old Testament in the story set in Egypt, Joseph is given a central role in the time of preparation.

You see it's in those times of preparation, those times when life is moving along relatively smoothly, that we are to be encouraged to cultivate a relationship with the Lord through reading and meditating on His Word and seeking to see its application in the various areas of our life. Joseph represents the understanding that is built up in such times and it comes to the fore at the moment it is needed. It comes with mercy and compassion, seeking to do what is just and right and loving. This is why Joseph is described as one who is looking for the kingdom of God; looking for those principles from the Word to rule his life. Joseph is that understanding born out of contact with the Lord. How unlike that masculine understanding represented by Pilate, the Roman authority, which is motivated by political and self-serving interests. This understanding represented by Joseph displays those qualities that we seek, qualities of simple obedience and the love, mercy, and compassion that flows from that. It is an understanding of truth that looks to what is good. And as with Joseph of old who rose to prominence, eclipsing even Pharaoh, so Joseph of Arimathea now supersedes Pilate as the custodian over the Lord's body.

Joseph and Pilate stand in contrast to one another as do the interior and exterior aspects of the natural man when we are being reformed and regenerated. These two men represent our own splitness between a natural and a spiritual life. So we can see here how those natural elements, so destructive of truth, are now giving way to the higher, more heavenly principles but it can only occur as we come to see what our lower nature is capable of. For when we truly see this then we, knowing ourselves, can be more merciful and compassionate in our treatment of others. These things, self knowledge and knowledge of others, these things go hand in hand. You see we become less judgmental when we have seen the beam in our own eye. When we have seen what we are capable of then we have the ability to minister to others from a much more loving space. We have the ability to remove the spec in our brother's eye.

It's interesting when we look at the names of Pilate and Joseph, for 'Pilate' means *armed with a spear* and he represents that aggressive, combative, or argumentative aspect of the natural mind. It sees itself as the sole authority and judge over what is good and. 'Joseph' means *abundance* and being of 'Arimathea', which means *high or a hill*, he represents an abundance of life that is much more inward. And we see now that what is higher is beginning to break in and influence what is lower. Higher motivations of loving our Lord and our neighbour now begin to exert their influence in regard to the Lord's body.

And what is the body, what is the Lord's body representative of? Well, it is that that serves to express the Lord's love, the Lord's will and life on the material plane. That's what his body did. It served to give sense based contact with divine love and wisdom. And so for us, what about us? In terms of the plane of our own life? Well, the Lord's life and will, the expression of divine love and wisdom that can be grasped with the senses, is found in the literal sense of the Word. It is the literal sense of the Word that is the Lord's body for it contains His spirit. It is through the literal sense of the Word that we gain contact with the truths that are able to teach us how we should live if we are to be brought into the created order for our lives. Which is the purpose of divine revelation, to teach us what good is. That is the purpose of truth.

Now Pilate represents the ego that yields to no one. It cares little for truth other than it's ability to serve itself, to get what it wants or desires. And so it represents that side of us that believes only in itself. Joseph coming into Pilate and requesting the body of Jesus represents the rising of our spiritual consciousness and how it seeks to take hold of the literal sense of the Word

represented in the body of Jesus, which to this point is under the authority and rule of Pilate or that ego,

And there are times when the Word appears powerless to help us in our lives, and this is what is represented here by Pilate's request or seeking of information from the centurion regarding whether the Lord is in fact dead. For in the eyes of the natural man by all appearances, the Word seems dead. And there are times when it feels dead for us, but this story shows us that it is precisely in those states of life that we are admonished to act with courage and belief. To act as Joseph did.

And how is it that he acted? Well, in obtaining the body he then went and purchased linen, for Joseph is the embodiment of our devotion and a willingness to risk all to do the right thing spiritually despite how things might look on the surface. Here's our willingness to maintain our belief in the regenerative power of the Word. His obedience and willingness to act in accordance with his understanding of the Word is described in his purchasing of this linen garment in which to wrap the Lord's body. You see the procure linen is to exchange money for the garment and represents spiritually the transforming of truth, represented by that money, for simple goodness, represented by the linen. The simple goodness is those things that the Word teaches and doing those things because the Lord commands them. Just a simple expression of innocence and a willingness to do no harm. In other words, when we are struggling in our faith, we need to compel ourselves to do the right thing. For it is a simple obedience to our understanding of the Word that is able to have those truths that we have learned from it bound together. That is, the things that are of the Word are brought into a wonderful connection as we look in simple obedience to love the Lord and love our neighbour appropriately. And this binding is the wrapping of the Lord's body in a linen cloth. All garments in the Word represent ideas with which we cloth our mind. And in this case, linen, which is made from flax, represents those simple external ideas that we have regarding the Word in spiritual life. This is a soft fabric representing the tenderness and innocence in those ideas which they are able to contain.

And so, having wrapped the Lord's body, Joseph laid him in a tomb, hewn out of rock. When we act on our faith in obedience to our understanding of the Word, something else happens. For these connections strengthen the presence of the Word in our memory in preparation for their transformation or resurrection into something powerful and living within our lives. This is Joseph placing Jesus' body in the tomb. That word 'tomb' in the Greek literally means

*memorial vault*. It is a memorial vault hewn from the rock. It is the work of an understanding devoted to the Word and the understanding that takes the simple truths of the spirit and lays them up in the memory with devotion.

So we can see that this handing over of the body of the Lord is the beginning of a significant shift in state within a person. The time just prior to the Sabbath, the time of preparation. And that shift occurs within us all. And it is a state of beginning, a state where the Word is held to be divine and yet there is little understanding as to where its divinity lies. There is a lack of knowingness concerning the internal sense, the spirit of the Word. And so as yet, an inability to experience its power to bring wholeness into our life. It is something sealed in a tomb or a memorial vault, something sealed up at the level of our memory which tells us of that state in which the Word is indeed something cared for and loved but it has yet to find its release from the memory into our very life.

And so it is that Joseph now having taken centre stage, passes from sight and our focus moves towards the women, those affectional states, the power of the affections that discover that the Lord has indeed risen. And that is what we will be looking at next week.

Amen.