

BISHOP PHILIP WRIGHT'S EASTER MESSAGE

PHILIP WRIGHT · FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2016

Philippians chapter 2 and verses 5 to 8 of the letter:

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

For this year's Lenten Season we chose as our theme "Living an Authentic Life".

The point is, when it comes to our relationship with God and with each other, there is no better person to bring to that relationship than the real you and the real me. The extent to which we can connect to our truest self will have a profound effect on our ability to develop meaningful and long-lasting relationships.

In addition, being true to oneself is a tremendously liberating and energizing experience.

No longer must we continue to pretend we are someone we are not;

No longer must we hide behind an image of who we believe everyone wants us to be;

No longer must we live a lie, as we like to say.

The truth is, to live in this manner of constantly trying to match up to some perceived expectation can be utterly tiring. We close each day exhausted and unhappy, and, I am sure, much of it contributes to the fact that many of us are not well; are not as physically healthy as we would like to be.

Bear in mind, however, that the path to authentic living consists of embarking on a journey – a life-long journey. It is not an overnight phenomenon. It is certainly not an instantaneous feat.

Instead, it matures as we mature, and it becomes nurtured by the very experiences of our lives – whether good or bad. In other words, we learn to live authentic lives by living authentically.

In addition to this journey toward authentic living, there is also a price to be paid. As ironic as it may sound, the freedom, the liberty, the inner peace of an authentic life also comes with a price – sometimes a very big price.

I believe, my sisters and brothers, that the most authentic life ever lived on this planet earth was that of Jesus Christ. He sought to live as genuine and as authentic a life as is humanly possible. He decried hypocrisy, pride, and selfishness – the sort of things that often work against living an authentic life. He also challenged individuals to strive for their greatest good, emphasizing the point that his Heavenly Father demanded no less than that.

The Jesus we see in the gospels worked for no one's approval other than that of his Father in heaven. His passion, his desire, was to do the will of the Father, and to do so faithfully and authentically.

This is why I earlier made the point that to live authentically has a price. Jesus paid the ultimate price. You and I may not be so fortunate but, nevertheless, this world will exact from us its due whenever we seek to be true to our values and our principles and our integrity and ourselves. It may explain why at some point we all seem to compromise and give in to the temptation of living a less than authentic life. It is as if the price becomes too much to bear. We stand to lose too much and so we opt for an easier road of concession and conciliation.

There is another great irony, isn't there? Despite the demand we make for high moral standards in our leaders and those in authority, for instance, we readily accept their shortfalls saying, 'He or she is only human'; and that statement alone is used to cover a multitude of sins – over and over again. Yet, the writer of the Letter to the Philippians, in our epistle reading this morning, made it clear that Jesus, in his

humanity and even after surrendering his divinity, did not compromise but live the authentic life to the very end despite having the free will to choose otherwise.

I suppose the truly humble person is one who has gotten in touch with their true self. It is the person who has come to the point of realization that the best person to be is yourself – no more pretensions, no more lying, no more desire to prove anything, or to impress anyone, other than to be your best self with God's help.

The powerful example Jesus has left us in Holy Week (the Week of his Passion) is that when we have attained to this level of self-awareness and humility (of authenticity in our lives), though friends may deny and betray us; though others may turn on us when we thought they 'had our back'; though we are treated unjustly; though we suffer innocently; though we are crucified on the cross of public opinion by the nails of hateful and mean speech: we must not compromise and feel the need to be anyone other than who God has made us to be – our authentic self.

One final important point offered as a word of encouragement and hope to all of us who may relate to the message Holy Week brings to the faithful. The message is this: No Good Friday comes to us without the promise of Easter.

In other words, whatever we may be made to endure because we seek to live an authentic life and we seek to do what is right and true and wholesome; let us remain of good cheer knowing that the God we serve always vindicates the one who is faithful to the end – in the same way he did for His only Begotten Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the Good News! We must never fear living our lives for God because He will bless and honour our efforts. Easter teaches us this in a most powerful and moving manner. The promise of new life, new beginnings, is ever the Christian reason for living an authentic life.

Amen.