

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Encounter Jesus in Good Times and in Bad”

Bishop Frank Schuster

The best image I have ever found for the Gospel this weekend is in Bishop Robert Barron book *Heaven in Stone in Glass*. He writes about how in some Cathedrals in Europe, if you look closely, sometimes you can find the wheel of fortune depicted in the artwork. We are not talking about a casino game or television program. I am mentioning it because the medieval wheel of fortune he talks about has something very important to say to us that is spiritually beneficial. To give you a picture, there are four interesting figures depicted around this wheel. The fellow on top says in Latin, “Reigno” “I am king, I reign”. There is an unfortunate chap on the side who is falling from grace saying, “Regnavi, I used to be king, I used to reign” Then at the bottom, there is this pitiable pauper who says, “sum sine regno, I have no power. I don’t reign.” Then, as we continue our journey up the wheel of fortune, there is this arrogant fellow who says, “Regnabo. I am going to reign. I will be king.” And the wheel of fortune goes round and round and round.

This work of art seems to suggest that if you are the pauper, well, hang in there, there is only one direction from the bottom and that’s up. If you are power hungry, seeking fame, you may get it, but it won’t last. If you are master of the universe, well, good for you but you won’t be forever. Round and round the wheel will go, where it will stop for you, nobody knows. An interesting thing about the wheel of fortune as a work of art: anyone who walks through the Church doors walks into a place where princes and paupers are both welcome. They can look up and place themselves somewhere on the wheel.

At the center of the wheel of fortune, however, who do you think we find? None other than Christ the King, himself! The invitation of this medieval artwork is, if you find yourself someplace on the wheel of fortune in life, going round and round, the invitation is to stop living on the edge of the wheel. Rather, go to the center of existence wherever you find yourselves so to find Jesus, who alone transcends the wheel of fortune and the fickleness of life. Jesus exists at the center of the wheel because he was just as divine when he was born in poverty as he is in heaven. Jesus was just as much royalty on Good Friday as he was on Palm Sunday. No matter where Christ found himself in life, he transcended the wheel of fortune. And this is a great image for the readings this weekend because Jesus in talking about this spiritual conundrum. Jesus says, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” For those whose lives revolve around the wheel of fortune, life feels like that.

How do we transcend from the periphery of the wheel to the center where Christ reigns? The journey begins with humility, as the Gospel spells out. Like Sirach tells us in our first reading, “My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than giver of gifts.” Of course, what do we mean by humility? Humility, it seems to me, isn’t false self-abasement. Humility isn’t making show of how lowly I am.

Humility, it seems to me, is rather akin to honesty. Being humble means standing on *humus*, a Latin word that means “ground”. A humble person is grounded, he or she has an honesty about who they are, that no matter where life takes them to riches or poverty, they transcend the wheel of fortune by being centered, grounded in Christ.

A great example of this is Mother Teresa whose feast day is approaching. When you read about Mother Teresa’s life and read some of the letters she wrote, it is interesting how Mother Teresa revealed quite spectacularly that she sometimes placed herself at the bottom of the wheel of fortune in her relationship with Christ. Did you know that? It seems incredulous to us, does it not? And it is clear from her letters that she wasn’t being disingenuously pious or “fake” in her humility. Her humility was real. My take is, like many saints before her, God helped her to feel what the poor and the dying she served felt like inside. With the heart of a mother, she felt for her children. That Mother Teresa felt this way at times, in my opinion, does not lessen her sanctity. On the contrary, I think her letters make her more human and more accessible to us.

And that brings us quite speedily to the point. In Mother Teresa’s darkest spiritual moments, ask yourself, how did she respond? As Mother Teresa found herself at the bottom of the wheel of fortune, what was her reaction? Did she self-medicate so to attempt to forget her problems? Did she max out her credit card on things that eventually turn to dust? Feeling how she did at times, did she try to spin her wheel of fortune in vain desperation in ways we often do? No. She responded to her place on the wheel with humility and fidelity, grounded and centered on the terra firma of a relationship with Jesus. Existentially, she sometimes experienced herself at the bottom of the wheel, and behold, the last has become first, and so can we if we can learn from her example.

A good spiritual reflection therefore this coming week could be: where am I currently on the wheel of fortune right now? Are you the king or queen of your mountain, on top of your game, well, that’s good, one day you won’t be. Are you the unfortunate pauper in the spiritual life, having every kind of bad luck? Well, sorry about that. The good news is things can only get better. Regardless of where I find myself on the wheel of fortune right now, a better question is how grounded am I in my relationship with Jesus Christ? It is a better question because only Jesus can make sense of our lives in good times and in bad and in sickness and in health.

My friends, a powerful doorway to a deeper relationship with Jesus is the holy Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we see the all-powerful, all knowing and eternal majesty of God fully and truly present to us in what appears to be simply bread and wine. That’s humility. The all-powerful God loves us so much that he wants to be as close to us as food and drink. This message comes at a good time because the Church in the United States is beginning a three- year Eucharistic Revival with a Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in the summer of 2024. We will learn more about our Archdiocese’s participation in the coming months.

You see, when we receive Christ into our hearts during Communion, we receive an invitation. No matter where our lives are at right now, no matter if things are going well or going badly in life, no matter where we find ourselves on the Wheel of Fortune: God wants to be incarnate in our hearts through Holy Communion and be food for the journey. Regardless of what seat at table we are invited to right now in life, the invitation is to walk humbly with our God toward the center of our existence where we will find Jesus, who alone can offer us salvation.