

Proper 6 Year C

My sister told me a joke, which I like and which leads me into the topic for today. The joke goes like this:

My brother, sister and I all live long lives but each of us, in turn, reach the point where we breathe our last and find ourselves at the pearly gates. First, my brother Tom approaches St. Peter, but instead is suddenly greeted with a big wet kiss by Granny from the Beverly Hillbillies, who locks arms with him and says that they're going to be spending lots of time together. My repulsed brother looks at St. Peter and pleads for help, but St. Peter only says, "Tom, this is how you will pay for your sins."

Then my sister Meg found herself at the pearly gates where she is greeted with a big wet kiss by Gomer Pyle, who locks arms with her and says they're going to spend lots of time together. "Same deal" says St. Peter to my horrified sister. "This is how you will pay for your sins."

Then I in turn find myself at the entryway to heaven, greeted by Sandra Bullock. You can imagine how relieved I was, but then I looked at St. Peter, who said to me, "Well Kevin, Miss Bullock has to pay for her sins."

The theme, which runs through all our readings this morning like a thread is that of our sins and how we pay for them, thus the joke. But the topic, of course, is no joke.

In that long OT lesson about the sins of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, we are told that, as punishment for killing Naboth, Ahab's blood would be similarly be licked up by dogs, and his household, his family, would be destroyed. That's a good dose of old fashioned Hebrew religion. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and there are lots of people who think they want that kind of religion today.

And in our second reading Paul is writing to some people who thought they wanted that kind of religion, with a twist. This group thought that you could perform good works, which would then offset, counterbalance, the sins they had committed. "Afraid not" said St. Paul, who wrote: "We are justified before God not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ."

So if we have to forget the "eye for an eye" approach, and if we can't do good things to make up for bad things we have done, how does it work?

For this we must turn to the gospel, where Jesus was invited to the home of a righteous man who was appalled and insulted when a known 'sinner' washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried his feet with her hair.

After a long exchange with the “righteous” man, it is clear that Jesus is moved by the genuine sorrow this woman had, the love with which she expressed it, and her wish to stay with Jesus. And that’s it. Christianity 101.

The whole thing about an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is just vengeance.

The attempt to balance life’s scale is impossible. Genuine repentance, love and thankfulness to God, and a desire to live more closely with Christ are all God is looking for.

Simple and yet very demanding, for what God really wants is our heart and our attention.

And so, when life comes full circle, we’re not going to be greeted by either Gomer Pyle or Sandra Bullock. We will be greeted by our Lord and friend, who will say, “Your sins are forgiven; go in peace.” Amen