

MARCH 18, 2026 MSGR. ROBERT NUSCA

In today's Gospel, as we've heard, now Jesus has just cured a paralysed man by the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, and now controversy arises. Jesus is now accused of breaking the Sabbath by performing miracles. In addition, he's accused of making himself equal to God, by calling God "Father." The irony of these accusations I think should be evident to the reader of John's Gospel, for from the very first verse, we're told Jesus is the divine word of God, the logos. He is therefore equal to, indeed one in being, with the Father.

This is further underscored, as we just heard, in statements by our Lord himself in today's Gospel, that whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father has given all judgement to the Son, and anyone who does not honour the Father who has sent him—does not honour the Son, does not honour the Father who sent him, and so forth.

And I think that several things emerge now for our reflection. First of all, today's Gospel leads us to reflect that on the mystery of God the Father. Here is the mystery of mysteries of our faith. The Father is the first person of the blessed trinity. The invisible creator God, who sent his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the world for our salvation. Indeed, the Apostles' Creed begins, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." So the catechism of the Church calls this the first affirmation of the creed, and the most fundamental.

And as we reflect upon God the Father, many images come to mind. We think of the creator God, of the book of Genesis. Who in chapter 17 speaks to Abraham, identifying himself as "El Shaddai," or God Almighty. The voice of the Father speaks to Moses from the burning bush, atop Mount Sinai. And here he reveals his name to Moses as "I AM," or "I AM WHO I AM."

In the book of Exodus, we're led to reflect upon the glory of God, who leads his people through the desert. As a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. Here God works great signs and wonders, causing the manna to fall from the sky, and water to flow from a rock. The prophets speak with the Father's voice. They speak with his authority. Enoch walks with God. Elijah is taken up to God in the fiery chariot. Isaiah describes visions of God's heavenly throne room with the angels. Ezekiel is given visions of the glory of God, by the waters of the river Chebar.

The theologians and the mystics tell us that God is pure mystery. That ultimately, the greatness and the glory of God remain beyond the power of human language to fully express. But ours is a personal God. A loving God. Ours is a merciful God. A God who is just. A hidden God, who at the same time reveals himself to humanity. Ours is the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, of Isaac, of Jacob. The God of Sarah, of Leah, of Racheal. He's your God, and my God.

Jesus teaches us to pray to God, addressing him as "Our Father, who art in heaven." Much more than a monologue then, in which we somehow present a list of requests to the Father, prayer leads us to enter into a living dialogue, a communion with God, as we address God in prayer, and await his reply.

So, as we reflect upon the mystery of the Father during this season of Lent, we're reminded of the great importance of persevering in the spiritual life. Of deepening our faith. Through prayer, through the life of the sacraments.

Second, I think the theme of opposition to Jesus, and by extension opposition to the will of the Father, represents an important theme in all of the Gospels. In Mark, we have a certain emphasis on the mystery of

spiritual warfare, the invisible powers of darkness that oppose Jesus, and strive to undermine God's plan of salvation. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus is opposed, as we've heard, by the religious experts. By the political elite of his day. And as we will see, he is betrayed by Judas, his apostle, who betrays our Lord.

Here, the kingdom of the world, the earthly empire, has always been opposed to the kingdom of God. The world has always been hostile to those who announce the good news of salvation, and give witness to the values of the everlasting kingdom of heaven. From John the Baptist, to the martyrs of the Church, even in our own time. This opposition between the values of the kingdom and the values of the world ultimately involves what Saint Pope John Paul II referred to as, "The struggle for the world's soul." The struggle for the world's soul.

And he reminds us, as if on one hand, the Gospel and evangelization are present in the world, on the other hand, there's also present a powerful anti-evangelization, which is well organized, has the means to vigorously oppose the Gospel and evangelization. He goes on to add that the struggle for the soul of the contemporary world is at its height where the spirit of the world seems strongest.

As I've said on other occasions, philosophers then have called our own time a destitute time. Destitute. Both because so many people have turned away from God, and destitute also, because with the erasure of God from human experience, from public discourse, we are witnessing also the erasure of what's greatest and most noble in the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

Teachings of the Church then continue to call us to be witnesses today to Christian love. To Christian joy. To the sanctity of life, again, in an era marked too often by violence and indifference. To be witnesses to

Christian hope, in an era marked by growing despair and nihilism. To give witness to the power of the cross, against the narcissistic self-serving spirit of our postmodern, post-truth world. To be witnesses to the light of the resurrection, against the powerful culture of death.

At the same time, during the season of Lent, Saint Gregory the theologian reminds us that in order to be effective, we must begin with ourselves. Purifying ourselves, before trying to purify others. To be instructed, to be able to instruct. To become light, in order to illuminate others. To draw close to God, to bring him close to others. To be sanctified, in order to sanctify. In this way, we are witnesses to Jesus Christ—the way, the truth, and the life. And this is so much needed in our time.

So too Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, who we remember today, a great fourth century theologian, writes in his catechetical instructions, to "Wash yourself clean that you may hold a richer store of grace." He adds that "Sins are forgiven equally for all, but communion in the Holy Spirit is given in the measure of each person's faith. If you've done little work, you will receive little. If you've achieved a great deal, great will be your reward. So run faithfully the race of faith, and do so to your advantage."

So, as we continue to celebrate this Mass let us pray for the grace to enter more deeply into dialogue with God our heavenly Father, whom Jesus Christ reveals especially through our prayer, fasting, almsgiving, together with our love and service of the poor, during this season of Lent. Let us pray for, "The grace of a great spiritual renewal in our own time, indeed, a new Pentecost for the Church, and for humanity, in this third millennium," in the words of Pope Benedict XVI.

So let us always keep our eyes ever-focused upon the image of the City of God, the new Jerusalem, however distant it may seem at times, so to

spend our lives helping it to become a reality in our time. Let us pray not only that we may experience God's mercy during this season of Lent, but that we may always radiate God's mercy, God's light, God's love, to others, praying that through our actions, our words, and that all may be drawn to God. The eternal, all-powerful, good, and infinitely rich in mercy, God.