

# THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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What are we trying to do when we use the phrase “only human”?

- ❖ We're trying to comfort – “Don't be so hard on yourself...”
- ❖ We're looking for mercy – “Hey, I'm only human...”
- ❖ Acknowledging our limitations, offering comfort so that we don't get discouraged

Remembering that we're not God, dealing with our imperfections, and being merciful with those of others all seem to fit right in with the spiritual life.

- ❖ Yet in his Sermon on the Mount we hear Jesus giving us what seem like impossible standards for how to live...
- ❖ *Culminating* with him saying that we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We might be tempted to think this is just hyperbole, that Jesus is exaggerating – except that we see *him* do all these things, and on a level beyond what he describes.

- ❖ So then, how are *we* supposed to do this? Doesn't Jesus know that we're only human?
- ❖ Of course he does – but that's not how God created us to be.

In the beginning, God created us for a relationship with him so intimate that God breathes into Adam his own “breath of life.”

- ❖ More than just biological – it's what makes Adam “a living soul,” which is distinct from everything else God has made.
- ❖ From the beginning, God intended to dwell in us so that we could participate in a relationship that would otherwise be beyond us.

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- ❖ It's part of what St. John means when he writes, "*We love because God first loved us.*"

But when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, their sin separated them from God, and they're sent out of his presence to live in the world as "only human."

- ❖ Satan meant for that to be a mortal wound, but the joy of the gospel is the message that it only knocked the wind out of us.
- ❖ Now, through Jesus, not only can we recover the *original* presence of God, but enjoy an even *deeper* relationship as part of *Jesus' own body*.

That's why so much of what Jesus says or does seems radical and even impossible for us – it is!

- ❖ St. John tells us that we can only love because God first loved us – which is Jesus can point us beyond our natural, mutual affection to the total self-giving love of God himself.
- ❖ St. Peter writes that we're not limited to our own resources, but have become "partakers of the divine nature," which is why Jesus can point to radical generosity and self-offering.

We even see Peter and John live this out themselves in Acts 3, where a lame man asks them for alms.

- ❖ Instead of replying that he didn't have any cash (like I've done so many times), Peter replies, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk," and helps him stand.
- ❖ Then everyone stands by amazed as the man goes into the temple with them, leaping and praising God.

Now if you're thinking, "Fr. I'm still working my way up to handing out a Blessing Bag," that's OK.

- ❖ God doesn't always work miracles through us, though I imagine he'd like to do more if we'd let him.
- ❖ The Holy Spirit does unseen, but still miraculous work *in us* along the way, and Peter and John give us another example if we just continue in Acts.

After being arrested and jailed, they're brought before the council, where everyone is amazed at how boldly they argue the faith, despite their lack of training.

- ❖ There's no question that there's something more at work in them, but I think God has done something even more miraculous *in* them.
- ❖ Just stop and think about the last time Peter and John were here.
- ❖ About 2 months before, they'd stood in the same room, with the same council for the trial of Jesus.

Despite knowing what happened to Jesus, there's no fear in them.

- ❖ Before Peter denied even knowing Jesus when he was recognized, but now, filled with the Holy Spirit, things are different.
- ❖ Peter and John don't just testify that salvation comes only through Jesus, but speak directly to the fact that *they*, the council, are the ones who crucified him.
- ❖ Then, after the council warns them to be silent about this, they make it clear that they won't be.
- ❖ They are totally free to do God's will and to love as he loves, and they do it boldly and joyfully – and that's the miracle God wants to work in us as well.

God doesn't want us to be burdened by our imperfections, but he also wants us to know that "only human" doesn't define who we are.

- ❖ Jesus shows us that our limits are opportunities for God to share his own divine life with us, and the goal of the spiritual life is to let him.
- ❖ That means freedom from our own selfish desires and concerns so that we can rejoice in his will being done
- ❖ It means freedom from examining every relationship and interaction to see if we're being cared for, so that we can just love without fear of running out.
- ❖ It's freedom when we do fall into sin, to rise immediately instead of wallowing or spiraling, and offer our weakness to God, and begin again in peace.

That's why Jesus tells us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, and gives rest to our souls.

So as we prepare to receive Jesus himself in the Eucharist,

- ❖ ...think about what in you feels restless or imperfect, and invite him into that space.
- ❖ Then, as we go forth in the name of Christ, look for an opportunity today to make an act of love on his behalf – thinking or speaking well of someone, or helping someone.

If we make a habit of doing even that, we'll begin to see God making up the difference in our lives and the lives of those around us.