

To Whom We Belong - to God, to Church, to Each Other Fr. Tom Pringle

Hey, there you all, Father Tom Pringle here. It's an honor to be back with you for this session on the readings of the fifth Sunday of Lent. As with my previous talks, if you would like to pause the video here, for a couple of minutes to go back and read the readings for today, it would be helpful for guiding a deeper reflection for this week.

Opening Prayer

Let's begin with a prayer. *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Oh, God, we thank you for this opportunity to once again enter into a reflection on your word. As we further break open the scriptures for this Sunday, we ask that you fill our hearts with a sense of how we are your beloved sons and daughters. How we belong to you. Remind us of how we are also members of the body of Christ on Earth, your Church. Give us the courage to embrace the calling to be witnesses to the gospel in the world. And lead our brothers and sisters, lead others to an encounter with you. As always, we ask the Blessed Mother to continue walking with us on this Lenten journey. That she may wrap us in her mantle of care and protection. Praying that we are brought to a more fruitful encounter with her son, Jesus. We ask all this in His most Holy name. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Jeremiah 31:31-34

I like to begin this session by reading a bit of the book of the prophet Jeremiah. This would be Jeremiah 31:31-34. It says this. ***"See days are coming," oracle of the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke my covenant though I was their master," oracle of the Lord. "But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days," oracle of the Lord. "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people. They will no longer teach their friends and relatives, 'know the Lord,' everyone from least to greatest shall know me." oracle of the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin."***

God is Claiming Us

Boomers, millennials, Gen X, iGen, liberals, conservatives, believers, non-believers, so on and so on. As human beings we like to typically categorize other people. And these are people I associate with; these are people that I definitely do not associate with. We want to know where we belong, where we fit in. "These are my people, my crew, my ride or die." In our first reading, God says, ***"I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people."*** God is claiming us as His own. He's telling us that we belong to Him. There's a beautiful prayer, I'm sorry, a beautiful quote, a beautiful and challenging quote

from Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Where she says, *"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other."*

What a powerful message for our world today. We all need more peace, a lot more peace. Today I want to break open this idea of belonging in three different aspects of our lives. First, we belong to God. Second, we belong to the Church. And finally, we belong to each other. In the Old Testament scriptures, we see from the beginning, the story of God claiming the human family as His own. From the creation of Adam and Eve, where He breathes life into Adam. To the covenant with Noah, to Abraham, and Moses, God is journeying with His people, revealing Himself and teaching them how to live. We see the ultimate fulfillment of this in the incarnation, where God sends His only son. John 3:16. ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life."*** Scripture also proclaims in the first letter of John, ***"See what love the Father has bestowed on us. That we may be called the children of God."***

Know Your Identity

Knowing our identity in God, as beloved sons and daughters calls us to live in a particular way. As we talked about a few weeks ago, we all know there are times we fall short of living that identity. We sin. We separate ourselves from God. But God, in His infinite goodness is continually calling us back to Him. Offering forgiveness and a fresh start. Each time we receive this forgiveness and mercy we should be prompted to ask, how can we do better this time? and more fully live in right relationship with God.

In reflecting on this I really invite all of us to consider, are there areas in our lives that we try to keep separate from our relationship with God? Are there aspects of our hearts that we try to keep God out of? That we hide from Him? I invite us to lean into those questions. What are we holding back and why? Perhaps we're dealing with fear or pride. Maybe we're still struggling to fully trust God. We don't like not being in control as humans. Remember the words inscribed on the divine mercy image that we spoke about a couple of weeks ago. *"Jesus, I trust in you."* Don't hesitate to continually repeat that prayer and let it permeate into the depths of your heart. Seek each day to build your trust in God, turning over each and every aspect of your life and your heart to Him. The simplicity of repetitive statements can help counteract the lies that we sometimes believe about God, ourselves.

We Belong to God

As we continue to consider what it means that we belong to God, and that He calls us to live in a particular way. Let's not be timid about claiming our identity each day. Let's give ourselves permission to dwell in that space. That space of the simple and beautiful truth. Speak it out loud. I belong to God. I'm a beloved son or I'm a beloved daughter. Say it with me. I belong to God. I'm a beloved son or I'm a beloved daughter. Own that truth about your identity, because it's at the heart of who we are.

We Belong to the Church

Acts 2:42, proclaims this about the early Church. ***"They devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles into the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."***

What about us in the Church today? Are we devoted to the teachings of the Church? The life of our faith community? Do we attend mass? Do we receive the Eucharist and pray regularly? Are our hearts ignited by the truth and the beauty of our Catholic faith? I'm not blind to the reality that there are various struggles in the Church today, universally and at the local parish level. But this is a call for us to commit ourselves to recognizing the need to rely on God when those challenges arise, not to simply disengage. Perhaps in the midst of feeling unfilled or dissatisfied, we have given ourselves ongoing permission to complain about the state of the Church today. But we have to recognize that these words matter, and they break down the body of Christ. We all have to be accountable to stop doing that.

A Commitment We have to Make

So, let's make a commitment to edify our language, to rise up to the challenge and find words that are affirming, loving and gentle. Words that communicate God's love to others. Some ways that we can focus on belonging to the Church in a better way is to really examine our attitudes. Are we grateful for the sacraments and the priest make them available to us? Do we pray for our priests and the staff members of our local parish? Do we love and seek to learn more about the teachings of the Church? Do we seek to reconcile our hearts with aspects of Church teaching that we struggle with or don't fully understand? Do we ask God, what gifts He has bestowed upon us that He's asking us to share within the community, to lead, to serve, to encourage and pray for others?

God gifts His people with all that is needed for the church community. But when people fail to respond in generosity, the church is lacking in the gifts of those who are no-shows. We belong to God, and we belong to the church. It's worth every bit of our effort to avail ourselves to discern how God is calling us into the life of the church. And how He desires to use us to build at the body of Christ on earth, and to lead more souls to Him.

We Belong to Each Other

This leads us to our final point. We belong to each other. We belong to the human family, the people of God who profess the same faith as us, and also those who believe differently. Do you love your neighbor well? The poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. We suffer from a great deal of divisiveness in our world today. It brings a lot of pain and disharmony. Plus followers of Jesus, we have to lead the way, to take the responsibility for being peacemakers in a world that is so desperate to be filled with goodness, charity and hope. In the beginning of today's gospel reading there's a line in which a group of people address one of the apostles saying, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." We have the opportunity each day in our homes, our workplaces, online, and all the places that we spend our time to show people who Jesus is. We show this in our speech, our actions, and the way we treat every person that we encounter. We belong to each other. And we have such a profound opportunity as God's beloved sons and daughters to help others see their dignity and their worth. When we speak and act with love it opens up the

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opportunity to show others how much they are loved by God. Unfortunately, sometimes we squander these opportunities, because we see certain groups of people as undesirable or undeserving. We give ourselves the unfortunate permission to put our own opinions or our own sense of being, being right, ahead of this amazing opportunity to share God's love.

The best thing we can do in these instances is begin asking God to show us how to love, how to forgive, and how to understand others the way that He loves, He forgives, and He understands them. The servant of God, Dorothy Day, once said, "I really only love God as much as I love the person, I love the least." It's quite a reality check on how we ought to be navigating our every encounter with other people. We're to love abundantly with the generous and unending love of God. It's the work of our lives, and we have the opportunity each day to start fresh and try again.

Say It and Pray It

So where do we begin? Once again, recall the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta. "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other." I challenge each of us this week to take one concrete action. To live out one of the aspects of our belongingness we've reflected upon today. We belong to God. Say it and pray it. I belong to God. I am a beloved son or I'm a beloved daughter. Share that with a friend, post on social media. We belong to the church. Send someone at your parish a note of encouragement or thanks. Invite a friend to mass. Meet someone new in your faith community and ask them how you can pray for them this week. Ask how you can use your gifts to volunteer or serve in your parish community. We belong to each other. Spend an hour this week with someone who needs help. A widowed neighbor or a struggling family member. Talk to a colleague, or a classmate that you don't typically converse with. Listen more than you talk, and simply seek to be present to them.

As we enter into the final days of this Lenten season, may we pray to have the courage to allow God to use our hearts and our lives to bring His love and His peace into the world. I'd like to conclude today by praying the prayer of St. Francis. It's a beautiful prayer. If you know it, I invite you to please join me as we pray together.

The Prayer of St. Francis

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. Oh, divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console. To be understood, as to understand. To be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.