

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (9/28/08)

Last week we heard God declare that His ways are not our ways. Some of the Israelites were complaining during the Babylonian Exile that God's punishment was unfair. They thought that the destruction of Jerusalem, the death of many people, and their forced servitude was too harsh. God responds by reminding the people that sin has real consequences. We are not talking about white lies, but sin of major proportions, mortal sin. It is a deliberate turning away from God and substituting our own system of right and wrong in place of God's. God calls His people to Love of God and Neighbor. But the people gradually allowed systemic sin to enter their lives, such as worshipping pagan idols, adultery, cheating the poor, or just ignoring the needs of the poor, widows and orphans. The people just accepted them because they were commonplace. Do you see any similarities to today?

The Gospel parable reminds us that God is not looking for what we say we will do, but what we actually do. The religious leaders really believed they were following God's will. But they weren't, because they had gradually blinded themselves to God's teaching. They had substituted their own sense of right and wrong for God's teaching. The sad thing is that even with the clear teachings of Jesus today there are many people doing the same thing. If you look at the Ten Commandments as Jesus teaches them, it is very easy to see that we have fallen away from God. We substitute our judgment of right and wrong for God's (making ourselves God) and we have replaced God with our pursuit of material things, we have decided to skip honoring God on the Sabbath, we legalize the killing of God's innocent new lives through abortion, we have condoned homosexual behavior and "marriages" and encouraged promiscuity and pornography, we have coveted our neighbor's wife and goods. We have done all these and more and accepted them as part of our country's daily life. We have kicked God out of our schools and public places and then complain when He is not there to help us. We are ungrateful for the gifts He gives us, especially the gift of our own life; we're not happy with what we have, we want more things, more control of our lives.

Polls tell us that we Americans "say" we are a religious people, but a look at our laws and our behavior tells a different story. Will we as a nation repent and turn back to God for Life, or will we continue to turn away from God and Die?

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (9/21/08)

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (ISA 55:8). More profound words were never spoken, and they very concisely sum up the human condition. God's ways are so far superior to our human understanding that we must occasionally take them on faith because we cannot understand them. It doesn't mean they are unreasonable, just that our reason sometimes falls short.

The gospel certainly falls into this category. If you take it on face value, it certainly seems unfair to pay the onehour worker the same as the 12-hour worker, which is what

the gospel tells us. However, it is not meant to be taken at face value. The parable is about how the kingdom of God is available to those who have been faithful since their youth as well as to those who have repented at the last hour. Salvation is a gift, not a just reward. That is the entire point of the parable. Jesus is telling the religious leaders that the Gentiles who become God-fearing will receive the same gift of salvation as life-long faithful Jews. Salvation is not "earned" it is given to those who ask for mercy with sincere hearts. Many Jews had difficulty with this teaching.

This does not mean that there is no justice. God demands justice for our actions. That is why all people, even mostly good people, will have to be purged of the temporal punishment of their sins before entering Heaven. Purgatory is what we call this process. The just punishment for sin must be cleansed before we can enter the presence of God. So it is much better to do the purification here on earth through works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving before meeting the Lord. But we rejoice that Mercy is greater than justice in that the gift of salvation is much greater than the pains of our sins. Let us pray for the salvation of the whole world!

Feast of the Exultation of the Holy Cross - (9/14/08)

The feast of the Triumph of the Cross should shock us. When you think about what the cross means, we are confronted with brutal savagery, torture and death. To call that a triumph seems to be incredibly evil. Yet in the eyes of God the offering of Jesus on the cross in reparation for the sins of all humanity is not something horrible and repulsive, but just the opposite, the ultimate gift of Love. The cross reveals how much God loves each one of us. Jesus freely offers the sacrifice of his life back to the Father in order that we might be reconciled to God. Not only reconciled for past sins, we now have the grace to avoid sin in the future. And if we should sin again, with repentance God forgives our sins and we start over again to be a reflection of all the good that God has created us to be. Remember, we were created by God to let His divine love flow through us and be a shining example to our brothers and sisters.

On this feast let us remember that what the world sees as a defeat is God's victory over sin and death. We no longer have to fear death because Jesus has conquered death for us and offered us the gift of eternal life. May our lives reflect this faith and trust in God's mercy, and may we turn away from sin and help our neighbors to grow in God's grace. Looking on the cross, may we fall to our knees in awe and thanksgiving at so great a Love. Amen!

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - (9/7/08)

The role of prophet is often glamorized but it is a difficult role to fulfill, and it comes with much responsibility. God tells Ezekiel that if he does not speak out against sinful behavior in others, the others will die but so too will Ezekiel for failing to warn them. Every church leader today bears that same responsibility, but so too do all the faithful. If

we allow our neighbor to sin without warning them of the consequences, we are guilty also. That is why you hear the Church speak out against injustice, especially the greatest injustice of deliberately killing the most innocent. As the old saying goes, if we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.

Jesus teaches His disciples about the need for reconciliation. They are to seek out those who have offended and try to help them accept responsibility for their offense. If the offenders do not listen, they have excommunicated themselves from the people of God. When members of the Church pray together to God for reconciliation among themselves, no matter what the offense, it will be granted them by God. The work of reconciliation, which Jesus accomplished, needs to be renewed and shared with all people from generation to generation. We need to help one another avoid sin, and that is an awesome responsibility for church leaders, for political leaders, for parents, for all brothers and sisters in the Lord. May God bless us in our work of helping all to turn away from sinful behavior and embrace the forgiveness of our God. Amen!