

## **Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (8/26/07)**

Strength seems to be the word for today's readings, appearing in both the Hebrews reading and the gospel. However, it is not muscular strength being discussed, it is spiritual strength. It is perseverance against the trials and temptations of the world to remain faithful to God and God's plan for us. It means accepting chastisement from God in order that we grow stronger and more faithful. Strength in faith is necessary if we are to allow God to save us. Strength in faith also means following the path of discipleship, doing good and avoiding sin.

It is a little frightening to hear Jesus say that only a few will be saved. "...many, I tell you will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough" (Lk 13:24). And the opportunity for salvation will not last forever, as the door will be shut while people are still clamoring to get in. In the book "The Screwtape Letters" by C. S. Lewis, the senior devil instructs the junior devil that the best deception is to whisper into people's souls that it's okay to keep sinning today because there is plenty of time to repent tomorrow. Many people will indeed put off repenting and becoming Christ-like because they think it's not important for today, there's always tomorrow. In so doing they condemn themselves.

Jesus wants all people to be saved, and His sacrifice makes the grace of salvation available to anyone who is willing to turn away from anything that doesn't honor God and try to live Christ-like lives to be good role models for those who are weaker. Our perseverance and strength in the Christ-life helps others to be strong also. May God bless us all through our difficulties to become stronger Christians!

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (8/19/07)**

We talked last week about the need to be doing what the Lord calls us to do while we await His return. But what are we to be doing? Specifically, the Lord leaves the choice of how to serve Him up to each of us. We all have different gifts but we can use them in many different ways. Suppose I am good in math and science. How do I use those gifts to serve God and neighbor? Many, many possibilities exist; perhaps I may study to be an engineer, or an accountant, or a teacher. I may even choose to develop new skills, perhaps as a social worker or a counselor. Maybe I feel called to serve the Lord as a priest or religious, or a missionary in poor parts of the world. Each of us has the free will to choose how to serve the Lord, and that choice may change several times during our lifetime. However, there is one common thread to all the choices we are asked to make to follow the Lord with our lives, and that is: To do good and avoid evil. The readings today remind us of the struggle against evil in all its forms. King Zedekiah was wishywashy, not having the courage to stand against influential people, and so allows them to drop the prophet Jeremiah into a well to starve. Then when a good person objects, Zedekiah allows him to save Jeremiah. Paul reminds us that we need to “... rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus...” (Heb: 12:1). We need to oppose sin and evil even to the point of shedding blood. Jesus echoes this in this well-known but often misunderstood comment, “Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Lk 12:51). Jesus recognizes that the forces of sin and evil have control of this world, and can only be overcome by the infinite value of the sacrifice of his life for us. Through the grace of that sacrifice we are invited to join Jesus in the fight against sin and evil until the final victory at the end of time, starting within ourselves. That is what we need to do for ourselves and what we need to teach our children. May God bless us as His fighters against evil!!

## **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (8/12/07)**

I think one of the hardest things in life is waiting. Some people, if they are waiting for a spouse or a child for example, may read the paper or a book to pass the time. Some may do puzzles, some may daydream, some even may pray. Waiting is something that all of us experience. In our faith lives we are also expected to wait, to wait for the fulfillment of our prayers and salvation. What do we do while we are waiting?

The gospel parable gives us an example of a servant who begins to lose focus on the meaning of his life and is no longer prepared to meet the Master. He will be severely beaten and lose his salvation (assigned with the unfaithful). The servant who was ignorant of the Master's will and acted unfaithfully will be beaten less severely, and apparently not lose his salvation. Much is expected of us who have been entrusted with the Gospel message.

The question is what will we do while we are waiting for the Master's return (and that can be our death or the actual return of the Lord at the end of time). How will we prepare for His return? Will we live a life of faithful obedience and growth in holiness as members of Christ's Holy Church? Or will we lose focus and begin to follow our own pursuits, thus endangering our salvation? What do we choose to do today?

## **Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (8/5/07)**

Almost all of us have a set of priorities in our daily life, even if we haven't thought about them lately. Priorities determine how we spend our time and resources. Periodically it is good to review our priorities in light of changing circumstances in life so that we receive the most and the best for our time and efforts. Our readings today invite us to do that review.

Are we too caught up in the passing things of life that cannot really satisfy? Both the reading from Ecclesiastes and the gospel challenge us to think about how we use the things of this world. Do we struggle to find security in wealth or fame or other passing things of this life? It is prudent to set aside some of today's wealth to provide for the future, e.g. retirement, education of our children, medical expenses, etc. But if we do this thinking that we can control our future, we will be in for the same rude shock as the rich man in the gospel: "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you." God alone controls the future, and we are invited to place ALL of our trust in the Lord, knowing that the good the Lord gives is much more rewarding than the passing things of this world. When we are able to trust that God will care for our needs, then we can let go of our temporary possessions to help our brothers and sisters in need. Doing thus, we reflect the light of Christ who let go of his possession of life in order to share eternal life with us. May God continue to bless our trust in Him alone!