

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (10/5/08)

One of the metaphors of the Old Testament was that the House of Israel was the “vineyard” of the Lord. It was to produce good and juicy fruit. Our first reading from Isaiah is a warning to the Israelites that since the people of Israel were not producing the fruit of obedience and justice, the Lord would no longer bless His vineyard but would let it go to ruin. This prophetic warning was given shortly before Babylon overthrew Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple and took the majority of the people into captivity.

Jesus refers to this prophetic utterance in His parable. The tenant lessees were the people of Israel and the servants the owner sent were the prophets. The son of course is Jesus Himself. Jesus pronounces a judgment on the religious leaders and faithless Israelites that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to a people that will produce its fruit. That people is the Church whose primary responsibility is to produce the fruit of obedience to the Lord and take up the responsibility of bringing the good news of salvation to the world.

We heard last Sunday of the incredible mercy of God in offering salvation to repentant people, even if they have spent their whole life in sin. God is only interested in our salvation, in sharing His Love with us in its completeness. But we all must actively choose to accept God’s offer. Again, last week we heard that actions speak louder than words. It is our actions that denote our wish to submit to the Lord’s will in our lives and in the world, to take up the “great Commission” Jesus gave to the Church, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” If we, as Church and as individuals, accept this commission to teach the world to be obedient to all that the Lord has commanded, we will be saved. If not, we will not be saved. The Lord gives us the freedom to choose our own destiny. May God bless us in His work. Amen!

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (10/12/08)

One of the most endearing images of God's Kingdom (heaven) in the Old Testament is that of the banquet, or wedding banquet. Since weddings were week-long celebrations of eating and drinking, they were major social events. At the banquet, there is an overabundance of food to satisfy every desire. It's natural that Israel would see this as an image of God's Kingdom. The reading from Isaiah reminds the Israelites that the mountain of the Lord where His temple is located is the source of all God's blessings. Jesus too often refers to the wedding feast as a metaphor for heaven.

There is a little twist to today's parable. Jesus directs this to the religious leaders and the implications are that those who were invited first, Israel, rejected the invitation. They all had excuses; they were too busy with the ordinary events of their daily lives. Therefore, as we heard last week, Jesus said the kingdom will be taken away from Israel and given to a people who would be fruitful (the Church).

The invitations to the banquet are now extended to everyone, bad and good alike. At first blush, it seems that Jesus is saying that the banquet feast is open to anyone without condition. But then he explains that the man not dressed in a wedding garment (not a practicing believer) will be rejected from God's Kingdom. The wedding garment was meant to symbolize the clothing of repentance, faith and good works of discipleship. Jesus ends the parable with a severe warning, "Many are invited, but few are chosen." (Mt 22:14). Let us pray that we will be prepared to enter the wedding feast of heaven! Amen.

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (10/19/08)

“Render Unto Caesar” is the instruction from Jesus in today’s gospel. What do we render? Well, we owe our prayers and respect to lawful authority. That means obedience to laws for the common good. But Archbishop Chaput in his new book, “Render Unto Caesar,” suggests that we owe more. “We do owe Caesar one final thing: our witness not simply as loyal citizens but also as faithful ones.” (pg 219). By faithful citizens he means being involved in the daily life of our country because we love our country. When we love something we want to give it our best. The best expression of our love for country, the Archbishop says, is to be more authentically and unselfishly Catholic in the public square. “We are citizens of heaven first. But...the more truly we love God, the more truly we serve the world.” (pg.220).

How do we best serve the world and our country? By being faithful to God’s commands for the world and for humanity. All of the social-justice teachings of the Church are based on one faithful fact: that every human life is created by God in His image. Therefore every human life has dignity and value given by God. To those who object to “sectarian religious” values being imposed on society, our response is that they are not “sectarian” but “human” values. The real debate comes from deciding what best promotes human values. It is patently obvious that things like abortion, pornography, indifference to the poor, just to name a few, are not in the best interests of the individual and the common good.

Let us pray that Catholics will grow in their love of country this election time. Let us render unto Caesar the leadership and values that best serve God and humanity. Amen!

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time - (10/26/08)

Sometimes in the Gospel the simplest instructions become the most difficult to implement. Jesus simplifies the law in response to the scripture lawyer's question, stating that all of God's teachings can be summed up in love of God with our entire being and in love of neighbor. Love God and love neighbor: sounds simple. Yet as we all know well the implementation is very difficult.

Loving God with our whole being means dying to all of my personal things that I might want to put before God. It begins with a personal dedication to God each morning, offering all that we do and think to God and His glory. It continues with prayerful reminders throughout the day to continue our dedication. It ends at night with a prayerful review of our day and asking forgiveness of God for our failures to love as we should.

Loving neighbor is probably more difficult. It is sometimes easier to love a God whom we have placed at a distance. But our neighbor can be in our face every day. To love our neighbor as our self means dying to self and giving equal dignity to the other, whether they are the alien, widow, orphan, unborn child: those who are the weakest among us. That dignity comes from the fact that every human life is made in God's image. God became human so that He could serve us all with His death and resurrection. Jesus asks His disciples to also dedicate their lives to serving God and neighbor. Once we understand that "service" means our dying and rising with Jesus we are well on our way to a life in Christ. May God bless us in our pilgrimage of life! Amen.