

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
TWENTIETH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME (A)

15 - 16 AUGUST 2020



SUNDAY REFLECTION

The readings today offer a powerful testimony to God's call for all humanity to embrace love, justice and mercy. The values espoused by the prophet Isaiah are justice, integrity and prayer – yearnings within the hearts of all humanity seeking the good and holy. The stated expansion of salvation to the Gentile world is seen in all three texts. The plan of God excludes no one from the Lord's love and concern. Reconciliation and mercy are the order of the day and healing is for all those in need. The prerequisite is faith which is a gift of God to all people.

The context of the readings is also worthy of our reflection. Isaiah writes to a Jewish community after the exile in order to build it up and address their place in a very different world. Paul addresses the question of the place of the Jews in God's plan in light of the acceptance by the Gentiles of Jesus and His message. How do they understand their call by God? How can they accept Jesus and still be faithful to their vision of salvation and the covenant promises? These are difficult questions that require discernment and a leap in faith. Matthew also writes in a crucial time for his community. Brothers and sisters are estranged and the community divided over its understanding of the Law, the place of Christ in God's plan of salvation and the importance of the traditions they honor. Divisions characterize his Church and he attempts to show Jesus as the Savior for all humankind.

These situations are not unlike those in our world and Church today. We desire justice, peace, integrity, and love in a world characterized by inequality, war, greed, and hatred. We want reconciliation when we see the divides in our churches and political systems between conservatives and progressives, as if neither side has something of truth. We fail to reinterpret time honored traditions for new times and situations as if reinterpretation means loss instead of growth. It is interesting that Jesus and Paul did just that – look at the tradition with new eyes and reshape it for the first century world. We must do no less in our period of history. The liturgy also reminds us of the need to accept diversity and to search for unity in a complex world and Church. Diversity is enriching. It does away with hierarchies and searches for equality and unity. Can we make a difference in our communities by changing our thinking and our approach to those who appear different than ourselves? The writings offer a blueprint for unity and we are called to apply the lessons to our own lives. However, we need openness and courage to forge a future that will give hope to our Church and our world.

STEWARDSHIP: In today's second reading, St. Paul tells the Romans, "God's gifts and His call are irrevocable." To what is God calling me today? What gifts are mine to share?

READINGS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY

23 AUG '20

Is. 22:19-23: Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord entrusts to Elakim the key of the House of David.

Rom. 11:33-36:

We all try to imagine God, we all have images of God in our heads. But Paul now reminds us of a basic truth: God is always greater; God is greater than everything we can imagine.

Mt. 16:13-20: Simon Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God: Jesus confirms Peter as the rock on which He will build His Church, assigning to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, this gospel poses a question to each church and each believer: who do we, as disciples, believe Jesus to be?

THE MASS

The Second Vatican Council defines the sacred liturgy, and particularly the Holy Mass, as the "source and summit" of our faith. But how? Why do Catholics celebrate the Mass? To answer these questions, we will need to ask an even more fundamental one: "Why did God become man?"

If you were to ask the average Christian why Jesus came into the world, they would most likely respond, "To save us from our sins." Although this answer is not incorrect, it is incomplete. The forgiveness of our sins is a consequence of Christ's mission, not its sole objective. In order to arrive at the real reason for Jesus' incarnation — meaning his "becoming flesh and dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14) — we need to read St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new! All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 17-18).

Before all else, Jesus comes to reconcile humanity, and indeed all of creation, with the Father. The word “reconciliation” is comprised of three Latin words: *re*, *con* and *cilia*. The combination of the first two words *recon* means “to come back together.” *Cilia* is the Latin word for “eyelash.” To be “reconciled,” therefore means to be eyelash-to-eyelash with God, to be brought into such a profound intimacy that your eyelashes are touching each other. This was the level of intimacy that God desired with Adam in the beginning. Yet, we know what happened. Adam sinned; humanity turned its back on God and looked towards the ego for consolation. Thus, Adam is banished from the Garden of Eden and an angel is placed to guard its entrance.

St. Ephraim the Syrian sees the Garden of Eden as a symbol of humanity’s closeness with God. True paradise is not so much a place as a relationship. To live in bliss is to dwell with the Lord. Sin makes such a relationship untenable. Yet, it is not hopeless. There is someone who can move the angel from his sentry, one who is spoken about in the first prophecy ever proclaimed in sacred scripture: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15).

The Church fathers recognized this prophecy as a *proto-evangelium*, a “prelude to the Gospel.” Jesus Christ is the fruit of the woman — the Blessed Virgin Mary — whose enmity will crush the head of sin and death. It is this connection between the prophecy of Genesis chapter 3 and the birth of Christ that led the ancient Church to refer to Jesus as the “New Adam”: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life” (1 Cor 15:21-22).

Before all else, God becomes man in order to reconcile the fall of Adam and re-establish the communion he lost through sin. This can only be accomplished by death. The Savior must die. He must eat the rancid fruit of humanity’s sinfulness in order to redeem it from the inside out. In so doing, death loses its force and now becomes merely a passage to everlasting life. Finally, He must give His people a way to share in His passion, death and resurrection. He must leave us a means by which to enjoy the communion that was wrought by Calvary. Cue the Mass.

DAILY SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS TWENTIETH WEEK 17 -22 AUGUST

Do You Want to be Rich?

Monday 17 August

“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. (Mt. 19:21-22)

Thank goodness that Jesus did not say this to you or me! Right? Or did He? Does this apply to all of us if we wish to be perfect? The answer may surprise you.

True, Jesus does call some people to literally sell all their possessions and give them away. For those who answer this call, they discover great freedom in their detachment from all material belongings. Their vocation is a sign to all of us of the radical interior calling we each have been given. But what about the rest of us? What is that radical interior calling given to us by our Lord? It's a calling to spiritual poverty. By "spiritual poverty" we mean that each and every one of us is called to detach from the things of this world to the same extent as those called to literal poverty. The only difference is that one calling is both interior and exterior, and the other calling is only interior. But it must be just as radical.

What does interior poverty look like? It is a Beatitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," as St. Matthew says, and "Blessed are the poor," as St. Luke says. Spiritual poverty means we discover the blessing of spiritual riches in our detachment from the material enticements of this age. No, material "things" are not evil. That's why it's fine to have personal possessions. But it is quite common for us to also have a strong attachment to the things of this world. Too often we want more and more and fall into the trap of thinking that more "things" will make us happy. It's not true and we know that deep down, but we still fall right into the trap of acting as if more money and possessions will satisfy. As an old Roman catechism puts it, "He who has money never has money enough."

Reflect, today, upon the clear calling you have received to live in this world without becoming attached to the things of this world. Possessions are only a means to the end of living a holy life and fulfilling your purpose in life. That will mean you have what you need, but it will also mean that you strive to avoid excess and, especially, avoid interior attachment to worldly possessions. *Lord, I freely renounce all I have and own. I give it to You as a spiritual sacrifice. Receive all I have and help me to use it only in the way You so desire. In that detachment may I discover the true riches You have for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*

Being First!

Tuesday 18 August

"But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." (Mt. 19:30)

This little line, tucked in at the end of today's Gospel, reveals much. It reveals a contradiction between worldly success and eternal success. So often we seek out worldly success and fail to seek the riches that last for eternity.

Let's start with the "many who are first." Who are these people? To understand this we must understand the difference between the "world" and the "Kingdom of God." The world refers to a purely vain popularity within any given culture. Success, prestige, vainglory, and the like accompany worldly popularity and success. The evil one is the lord of this world and will often seek to raise up those who serve his unholy will. But in so doing, many of us are enticed by and drawn to this form of notoriety. This is a problem, especially when we begin to take our identity in the opinions of others.

The "many who are first" are those whom the world elevates as icons and models of this popular success. This is a general statement that certainly does not apply to every particular

situation and person. But the general tendency should be acknowledged. And according to this Scripture, those who get drawn into this life will be “last” in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Contrast this with those who are “first” in the Kingdom of God. These holy souls may or may not be honored in this world. Some may see their goodness and honor them (like Saint Mother Teresa was honored), but very often they are put down and considered undesirable in a worldly way.

What’s more important? What do you honestly prefer for all eternity? Do you prefer to be well thought of in this life, even if it means compromising values and the truth? Or are your eyes fixed on the truth and eternal rewards?

Reflect, today, upon the goal of building up treasure in Heaven and the eternal reward promised to those who live lives of fidelity. There is nothing wrong with being well thought of by others in this world, but you must never allow such a desire to dominate you or dissuade you from keeping your eyes on that which is eternal. Reflect upon how well you do this and seek to make the rewards of Heaven your exclusive goal.

Lord, please help me to seek You and Your Kingdom above all else. May pleasing You and serving Your most holy will be my one and only desire in life. Help me to shed the unhealthy concerns of worldly notoriety and popularity, concerning myself only with what You think. I give to You, dear Lord, my whole being. Jesus, I trust in You.

Gratitude Conquers Envy

Wednesday 19 August St. John Eudes Priest

“Are you envious because I am generous?” (Mt. 20:15)

This line comes from the parable of the landowner who hired workers at five different times during the day. The first were hired at dawn, the second at 9 a.m., the others at noon, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. Those hired at dawn worked about twelve hours and those hired at 5 p.m. worked only an hour. The “problem” was that the owner paid all the workers the same amount as if they all worked a full twelve hour day.

At first, this experience would tempt anyone to envy. Envy is a sort of sadness or anger at the good fortune of others. Perhaps we can all understand the envy of those who put in a full day. They worked for the full twelve hours and received their full pay. But they were envious because those who worked only an hour were treated by the landowner with much generosity receiving a full day’s wage.

Try to put yourself into this parable and reflect upon how you would experience this generous action of the landowner toward others. Would you see his generosity and rejoice for those treated so well? Would you be grateful for them because they were given this special gift? Or would you, too, find yourself envious and upset. In all honesty, most of us would struggle with envy in this situation.

But that realization is a grace. It’s a grace to become aware of that ugly sin of envy. Even if we are not actually put into the position of acting upon our envy, it’s a grace to see that it’s there within.

Reflect, today, upon whether you see any traces of envy within your heart. Can you sincerely rejoice and be filled with much gratitude at the success of others? Can you sincerely be grateful to God when others are blessed with the unexpected and unwarranted generosity of others? If this is a struggle, then at least thank God that you are made aware of this. Envy is a sin, and it’s

a sin that leaves us dissatisfied and sad. You should be grateful you see it because that is the first step in overcoming it.

Lord, I do sin and I honestly admit I have some envy in my heart. Thank you for helping me to see this and help me to now surrender that over. Please replace it with a sincere gratitude for the abundant grace and mercy You bestow on others. Jesus, I trust in You.

Without Charity...

Thursday 20 August St. Bernard Abbot, Doctor of the Church

“The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, ‘My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?’ But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.’ Many are invited, but few are chosen.”
(Mt. 22:10-14)

This may be quite shocking at first. In this parable the king invited many to the wedding feast of his son. Many rejected the invitation. He then sent his servants out to gather anyone who would come and the hall was filled. But when the king came in, there was one not dressed in a wedding garment and we can see what happens to him in the passage above.

Again, at first read this may be a bit shocking. Did this man really deserve to be bound hand and foot and thrown outside into the darkness where there is wailing and grinding of teeth, just because he didn't have the right clothing on? Certainly not.

Understanding this parable requires we understand the symbolism of the wedding garment. This garment is a symbol of one who is clothed in Christ and, specifically, one who is therefore filled with charity. There is a very interesting lesson to learn from this passage. First, the fact that this man was at the wedding feast means he responded to the invitation. This is an indication of faith. Therefore, this man does symbolize one who has faith. Second, the lack of a wedding garment means that he is one who has faith and believes all that God says, but has not allowed that faith to permeate his heart and soul to the point of producing true conversion and, therefore, true charity. It is the lacking of charity in the young man that condemns him.

The interesting point is that it is possible for us to have faith, but to lack charity. Faith is believing what God reveals to us. But even the demons believe! Charity requires we embrace that will interiorly and let it transform our lives. This is an important point to understand because sometimes we can struggle with this same situation. At times we can find we believe on the level of faith, but are not living it. Both are required for a life of authentic holiness. Reflect, today, upon both your faith in all that God has spoken, and the charity that this hopefully produces in your life. Being a Christian means you let your faith sink from your head down to your heart and will.

Lord, may I have deep faith in You and in all that You have spoken. May that faith sink into my heart producing love of You and others. Jesus, I trust in You.

Being All In!

Friday 21 August St. Pius, X, Pope

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Mt. 22:34-37) "With your heart, with your soul, and with your mind." In other words, with your whole being! What does this depth of love look like practically speaking? It's easy for this to become a lofty thought or sermon of words, but it's challenging to let this thought or sermon become a testimony of our actions. Do you love God with your whole being? With every part of who you are? What does that mean exactly?

Perhaps this depth of love will manifest itself in many ways, here are a few qualities of this love that will be present:

1) Entrustment: Entrustment of our lives to God is a requirement of love. God is perfect and, therefore, loving Him requires that we see His perfection, understand this perfection, and act in accordance with it. When we see and understand who God is, the effect is that we must trust Him completely and without reserve. God is all-powerful and all-loving. An all-powerful and all-loving God must be trusted to an unlimited extent.

2) Interior fire: Entrustment of ourselves will set our hearts on fire! This means that we will see the Holy Spirit do amazing things within our souls. We will see God acting and transforming us. It will be more than what we could ever do to ourselves. God will take charge and do great things in us, transforming our lives, just as a blazing fire becomes all consuming.

3) Actions beyond your ability: The effect of a blazing fire of the Holy Spirit within us is that God will do great things in the lives of those around us through us. We will witness God at work and be amazed at what He does. We will witness first hand His amazing power and transforming love and it will happen through us. What a gift!

Reflect, today, upon your total love of God. Are you all in? Are you completely committed to serving our Lord and His holy will? Don't hesitate. It's worth it!

Lord, help me to love You with my whole heart, mind, soul and strength. Help me to love You with my whole being. In that love, I pray You transform me into Your instrument of grace. Jesus, I trust in You!

Our Blessed Mother

Saturday 22 August The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

"The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.'" (Mt. 23:2-7)

Saturdays are traditionally dedicated to the honor of our Blessed Mother. What a contrast there is between the Pharisees and our Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven and Earth!

First, we start with the Pharisees. They were continually condemned by Jesus for their pride and self-righteousness. They spoke prayers to themselves, sought out places of honor, demanded the respect of others and were completely self-consumed. Jesus' continual

condemnation of them was an act of mercy on His part. It was a way of trying to break them out of their pride, helping them to see the light of truth.

Second, we contrast this with our Blessed Mother. She was humble beyond imagination. She is the Immaculate Conception...perfect in every way. She carried every virtue within her soul. She is the New Eve, the new Mother of all the Living. And she is honored eternally as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

The stark contrast is seen in the way she lived. It's seen in the fact that she had every right to exalt herself and to expect honor and respect throughout her life. But, in her humility, she claimed no such right. She allowed herself to remain hidden and even ridiculed for becoming pregnant out of wedlock. She was unlike the Pharisees in every way.

But now, for all eternity, God has raised her up. She will eternally be seen as Queen and will be honored and loved by all. All her virtue will perpetually shine forth as she has been rewarded and exalted for all to see.

Reflect, today, upon who you are more like. Are you more like the Pharisees who seek to exalt themselves? Or are you more like our Blessed Mother who humbled herself. Choose to imitate our Blessed Mother and God will eternally reward you, too!

Lord, may I see the beauty and magnificence of Your mother's soul. May I love her and honor her. And in that love and honor, may I imitate her in every way. Jesus, I trust in You.

