

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Christ Should Be Every Christian's Yardstick September 13, 2020.

Life is complicated. We run into problems and dilemmas that create doubts and difficulties. We need an answer. Unfortunately, we try to fix everything ourselves, sometimes we use solutions from a popular writer, speaker, or website. **We have a tendency - left over from original sin - to measure out difficulties according to a limited, human yardstick. But Jesus came to earth precisely because he knew that human yardsticks are not good enough for our dilemmas. We need to learn to measure all things according to Christ's standards.** We need Jesus' guidance, just as St. Peter did in this Sunday's Gospel passage (Matthew 18:21-35). ***"Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?"*** This passage immediately follows Jesus' instructions to his Twelve about being good shepherds and lost sheep. (Matthew 18:10). The disciples must be discussing those instructions, or even arguing about how many times a good shepherd should go after that same lost sheep. Peter's question leads to clarity because there is no limit on the number of times we have to forgive someone who has sinned against us if we see the connection between love and forgiveness. Refusing to forgive is refusing to love, and as Christians, it is never acceptable not to love. That is why it is never right to withhold forgiveness either.

The relation between love and forgiveness also helps us see the difference between forgiving a wrongdoer and enabling him to continue in his wrongdoing. Love wants the good for the beloved. A person who forgives a sinner loves that sinner; and because she loves him, she has a heart for his good. God's love is like this, too. God's forgiveness and love is always there for us to receive. Because God loves every person, God offers the good to everyone too, no matter what that person's sins may be. God does not keep a careful distance from us when we sin. What stands between us and God is only our own unwillingness to receive God's gifts.

The history of the Church is full of very complicated situations and dilemmas that were worked out only with love. King Ethelred II (also known as King Ethelred the Unready) of Wessex faced one of these in England in the late tenth century. England had been invaded by the Danish King Anlaf. Ethelred somehow managed to avoid being completely conquered by the invaders. But even so, the Danish soldiers were ravaging the countryside, especially around London, and tearing apart the social fabric. No matter how well he marshalled his forces and battled against the invaders, he couldn't stem the spreading tide of ruin and terror. The King was desperate to find a solution before the entire country descended into chaos. During a lull in the violent clashes, he decided to call in a different kind of soldier - a saint, a man whom all the land recognized for his holiness, austerity, and Christian wisdom. St. Alphege was a nobleman whose mother had tried to force him into politics, but who had instead chosen to become a monk. He dedicated himself to prayer and penance, and was soon recognized as a model Christian, so he was made a bishop. Following a Viking raid in 994, St Alphege, forgave the invaders and through Christian love, a peace treaty was agreed with one of the raiders, Olaf Tryggvason who even converted to Christianity and undertook never to raid or fight the English again. **What mere human efforts** - numbers of mounted soldiers, foot soldiers, swords and arrows in this case - **were unable to attain, was duly measured out by the unfailing yardstick of Christ** (love, forgiveness, communication, understanding.)

Jesus is the only sure way out of the tangle of dilemmas, questions, and problems in life. But following Jesus and making him our yardstick requires determination. At some point, every one of us has to make this fundamental decision. Unfortunately, too many of us wait too long before doing so. St. Paul explains what this decision is in the second reading (Romans 14:7-9). He tells the Romans: ***"None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself."*** In

other words, in order to fill our lives with the light and strength of Jesus, we have to live and die for Jesus and belong to Jesus. We have to give our lives to him. **We can't just be labeled "Christians" on the outside; we have to invite Jesus to come into our hearts and allow him to be our teacher, our friend, our Saviour, and our King.**

This is our loving God. God comes to our aid in Christ. We are beloved; we are loveable; we are known; we are pursued; we are chosen; we are noticed; we are understood; we are the sole interest of Our Father's tenderness. Our needs and weaknesses are an attraction for the Lord. He draws near. God is more interested in our need for him than in our perfection. Jesus comes to fulfill our needs every day through the working of the Holy Spirit, through the holy sacrifice of the Mass, through prayer, and through the Father's providential wisdom. God's love is our essence, it lives in our heart because we are made in his image and likeness. When we let ourselves be won over by the love of God, we start to act differently. There is more kindness in our gestures, more meekness in our words, less judgment and more understanding. We become a more assertive, fair, compassionate and empathetic person. We forgive more quickly and easily and allow joy to make a constant home in us.

If Christ is going to be our yardstick, we have to get to know how he sees things. We have to learn to see ourselves, others, and the world around us more and more as Christ does. Only then will Jesus be the real centre and guiding hand in our lives. **And only then will we begin to live the kind of interior peace and exterior fruitfulness that we really want to live. We should bring our questions to the Lord in prayer; we should cast the light of the Church's teachings on our moral and intellectual quandaries; and then, also like Peter, we should accept Christ's solution.**

Lord Jesus, help us to focus more on following you than on judging others. Show us who we are, and whom you want us to be. Grant us the grace to live the life of the Church with enthusiasm so that you can transform us into a new creature.