

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

September 27, 2020.

This Sunday we are treated to another beautiful passage in the Bible: *St. Paul's letter to the Philippians* (2:1-11). Paul tells us to be kind, loving, and merciful to each other and put the interests of others above ours. Then he says that we should have the same attitude in life as Jesus had. Jesus was forever God, but he did not regard this as something to be exploited. Instead, He emptied Himself of His Divinity, became a human being and even as a slave for us. He obeyed His Father for our sake, even to the point of death on the cross. St. Paul says, "**Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.**" This is not easy. Our society pressures us to think that the world revolves around us and our wants. However, we know the world is the Lord's.

It is difficult for us to explain our belief in Jesus. Jesus is so much more for us than just "the study of Bible". Jesus is not just a dogma of the Church, an intellectual doctrine. He is a living person. We should have a personal relationship with Him. We go through our days speaking to Him and listening for Him to speak to us. We know that He is the eternal Son of the Father, the Word of God present from the beginning of creation. But that is not how we relate to Him, or He to us. He is our closest friend, our deepest Love. We look at the Cross and are amazed at the extent of His Love for us. He is God, and yet He became one of us. More than that, He became a slave for us. Jesus came to serve us. He came to free us from the grasp of materialism. He came to renew the quest for the spiritual within us. He came to restore us to that place in creation that we deserted out of pride and selfishness. We sometimes tell the little children, "**Jesus came to open the gates of heaven.**" That is beautiful, the way that a little child can understand. For us adults we develop this thought into: **He came to instil the spiritual within us so that we can be united to the Eternal.**

With the Grace of God, we can do the work of God. But work is hard. It takes time and strength. We have to exhaust ourselves to be understanding, of our husband or wife, our children, our parents, our friends. Doing the work of the Lord means emptying ourselves for others. It also means doing everything we can to stay away from all that could hurt us. It takes work to control our temper, to be spiritual in our homes, to turn a house into a place of prayer, a little Church. I am sure that every married person has had to be more concerned with caring for his or her spouse than with how he or she has been treated by that same spouse. One snaps at the other, and the other has various choices: retaliate and snap back, employ the old classic passive aggressive behaviour known as the silent treatment, sulk, or say, "**I'm sorry for my part in this,**" and look for something to do together to change the subject and ease the upset. For those of my age, I am sure you remember the silliest words ever uttered by Hollywood were from the 1970 award winning old movie, *Love Story*, "*Love means never having to say you're sorry.*" No, love means always having to say we are sorry. However, that takes humility. Pride and marriage cannot co-exist, at least not peacefully. Nevertheless, through humility we can be like Jesus for each other. Marriage should be a confessional, not a courthouse. Blessed Mother Teresa also suggested a few ways to practise humility: "**To speak as little as possible of oneself, to accept contradictions and corrections cheerfully, to pass over the mistakes of others, to accept being slighted, forgotten and disliked, to be kind and gentle even under provocation, to choose always the hardest.**"

I am also sure that every parent has had to swallow hard when their children have said something thoughtless. Pre-Teens and teenagers can get snarly or develop an attitude. Parents know that they have to be more concerned with caring for the children than their own feelings. Parents do not bring children into the world so they can have little people telling them how wonderful they are. They have children to expand their love and to fill the world with new reflections of God's love. And yes it is an important part of parenting to bring children up to respect authority, but for their sake, not for the parents' sake. Finally, I am sure that every single person has been confronted with the choice of serving God or receiving the proper respect he or she feels due. We cannot serve God when we are concerned about how we are treated by others.

Jesus, who humbled Himself for us is our model. Like the two sons in the Gospel (Matthew 21:28-32), we are called to work in the Father's vineyard. The vineyard is your house and my house. The vineyard is your life and my life. The vineyard is that place where others are reaching out to us, seeking the love of Christ in us. They long for Jesus. They want to find Him. They can find Him within us, within us as Church and within us as individuals. For God to work through us, we have to take on the humility of Christ and be more concerned with others than with ourselves. Matthew 16:24: ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."*** We know that this means accepting our suffering so the world can be filled with sacrificial love, and the Kingdom of God might grow. But we usually just relegate this and parallel passages to the way that we handle crises, perhaps a diagnosis of cancer, the death of a spouse or some other such crisis. St. Paul in today's second reading didn't say to ignore our interests completely; he said to look out for others' interests, consider them more important. If we are struggling with selfishness, the first step to humility is to try to look out for the interests of others as well. Use some of our time, talent, and treasure for the good of others. We may start reluctantly, but soon we will do it willingly. It directs us to take up our cross in our daily lives. It tells us that to follow Christ we have to change our attitude in life to be like His. We have to be like the One who humbled Himself. This is difficult. It is difficult because pride is so deeply rooted in each of us. **But through the Grace of God we can conquer pride. We can be the people that God needs us to be for His Kingdom. Christ is the victor. With Him we can conquer all that holds us back.**

Micah 6:8 summarizes the whole episode so simply and straight forwardly: ***"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"***