

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 1, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 18:25-28

Thus says the LORD: You say, "The LORD'S way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair? When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, he does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

Psalm: Ps 25:4bc-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (6a) Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.
The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;
in your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD;
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and teaches the humble his way.

R. Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Brothers and sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.

Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself,

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel: Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him."



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – October 1, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

God at times appeals to our self-interest in order to get us to do what is right. In other words he uses our self-interest to reach beyond our self-interest, so to speak. We are shown this in the First Reading, where we find a straight-out argument between the people and God. The people claim that “The Lord’s way is not fair!” Earlier they had quoted the famous saying, “The parents eat sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ez 18:2). Apparently they are arguing that sin should be attributed to their fathers or mothers, but not to them. Therefore God is punishing them unjustly. God replies: “Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, *are not your ways unfair?*” He shows them that punishment comes to those who actually commit an iniquity, not to those who just happen to be born of the parents of the iniquity. “It is your own actions that matter. If you sin, it is fair that I punish you. If you do virtue, it is fair that I give you life.”

Jesus takes it one step further in the Gospel. We hear a parable about a man being asked by his father to go work in the vineyard. The man says, rudely, “I will not.” Surely he would be counted as one of the sinful people described above. Or maybe he just had a headache, or was not a morning person, or whatever. But when his father leaves the house, this one changes his mind and goes out to work hard on the grape vines. He has a brother. The brother says in effect, “Yes, of course I will go out and do your will!” Isn’t this exactly what God had been telling the people in the First Reading? I am sure the father in this parable was pleased, especially after the rude reply he had gotten from his other son. Of course, as we know, this brother too changed his mind. He did not bother to go at all. This second brother’s selfish interests were served by saying “yes, yes” to his father. It made him look good. But he did not trouble himself to actually do what he promised. Self-interest did not get him to do good, but only to seem to do good.

St. Paul says to look at what Christ did (Second Reading) if we want true motivation, as well as encouragement, solace, participation in the Spirit, compassion and mercy. Then we will not act out of selfishness, but will serve others humbly, as he did. This is the ultimate motivation in Christianity. “Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this God greatly exalted him.”* Self-interested motives are not the only ones. Let us just look at Christ—when we are at prayer and at Mass—and let him form us in humility. Let God make us good.

* Some scholars think these lines are from an early Christian hymn which Paul quotes and adapts. If your parish chooses the “short version” of the Second Reading, unfortunately this part is omitted. Be sure to spend time with it on the present page if that is the case in your parish.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. If we turn away from “wickedness” we are turning ourselves toward God. Spiritual writers call this turning toward God by the name, “conversion.” Are we converted just once or do we experience conversion many times in our lifetime? If so, why?
2. This reading says, “... humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.” Is this easy to practice? Who are the people in your life who act like this? Name some holy people and saints who do.
3. Using the idea of “conversion,” discuss the two sons from this reading. Which one needed to change and turn toward his father? Are you presently in need of conversion in any area of your life? What counts more in building community, saying some good words, or actually doing some good deeds? At which one are you better, words or deeds?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy, bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us and make those hastening to attain your promises heirs to the treasures of heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen