

Commentary on the Readings for Sunday, October 1, 2023

The 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever held to a belief in spite of its being contrary to the truth? Or perhaps you or someone you know has said, "I don't believe that; the Church says one thing, but I don't accept that; I believe differently." Holding onto a belief or practice, which is contrary to what legitimate authority teaches or declares is an indication of stubbornness or lack of humility. This is brought out clearly in the Readings for today where the theme is **humility of the will** and spirit. Let us see how this is played out as we read:

The **First Reading** is from the ***Prophet Ezekiel (18:25- 28)***. In this passage, the Prophet is restating what he has been told by God to tell the Israelites of the 6th century BC. At that time, the Jewish monarchy was disintegrating because it refused to be faithful and obedient to God. They worshipped false gods and followed all kinds of practices that were contrary to the Commandments. Yet, God was willing to forgive them if they turned away from their evil ways.

The **Responsorial Psalm (25:4-14)** is a prayer in which the psalmist and all of us ask God to guide us in His ways so that we might not fall into the trap of sin. It is not easy to do this because it might cause us to give in to God's ways; but if we do, verse 9 tells us that, "He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble His ways." We can't go wrong by following Him.

The **Second Reading** is from ***St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (2:1-11)***. As we said last week, "Philippians" is all about humility. In this week's passage, Paul is asking each of his followers (and us) to be humble enough to "look out for the health and welfare of others before ourselves." He then goes on to give us Jesus as the supreme example of humility. The beautiful poem that follows tells us how Jesus set aside being God to come to earth as man to teach us the "ways of God" and of the glory that will follow if we do. This poem is also the basis for the Church's dogma of Jesus' dual nature, being both true God and true Man.

The **Gospel Reading** is from ***Matthew (21:28-32)***. In this passage, Jesus is giving us a lesson on "change of heart." This story is somewhat like the story of the "Prodigal Son." Here we have two sons being asked by their father to do something for him that was within their capability and responsibility (maybe like cleaning up their bedroom). The first son refuses but then changes his mind and obeys. The other agrees to fulfill the command, but doesn't. Fidelity and obedience to the Father is at stake here, and Jesus is accusing the Chief Priests and Elders of being worse than prostitutes and tax collectors who will be forgiven because they have given up their sinful ways. The Chief Priest and Elders, however, will not be forgiven because they were stubborn and lacking in humility in refusing to accept the teachings of Jesus even though they knew better.

It is human nature to want to hold on to beliefs that we hold important; but when faced with an opposing viewpoint, we should, for our own good, be willing to exam it and compare it to what has been our accepted belief. In doing so, we might find out more about ourselves than we thought possible. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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