

Pondering the Word...

THE ANAWIM WAY

Daily Liturgical Meditations

*Twenty-Second to Twenty-Eighth Week
in Ordinary Time*

*August 29 to October 16, 2021
Cycle B - Year 1*

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What is the Anawim Spirituality?

Our spirituality has three essential characteristics:

Liturgical

The Liturgy is the source of our formation. Daily, we draw inspiration from the readings and prayers of the Liturgy, which we understand to be the ponderings of Mary's heart. For this reason, we honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life.

Eucharistic

Jesus in the Eucharist is the center of our spirituality. By faithful participation in Holy Mass and frequent Eucharistic Adoration, we are empowered by the Presence of Jesus to go forth to serve the people of God in all the circumstances of life.

Marian

We entrust ourselves to Mary, the mother and model of every Christian. She continually forms us in her spirit of humility, compassion and reconciling love, transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. She shares with us her spiritual motherhood as we are called to bring forth the life of Jesus in others.

If you would like to explore the Anawim Community further, we invite you to contact us.

Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

*Humbly welcome the word
that has been planted in you
and is able to save your souls.*

James 1:21

Theme for the Week

God calls us to enter his presence, listen to his word, and be filled with his love. Let us enter fully into the presence of the Lord each day, humbly welcome the word that has been planted in us, and act on it in love of God and neighbor.

TRUE RELIGION MUST REMAIN UNSTAINED BY HYPOCRISY

A Spiritual Reflection by Pope Francis

This Sunday we turn to a reading from the Gospel of Mark. In today's passage (cf. Mk 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23), Jesus addresses an important topic for all of us believers: the authenticity of our obedience to the Word of God, against any worldly contamination or legalistic formalism. The narrative opens with the objection that the scribes and Pharisees address to Jesus, accusing his disciples of failing to observe the ritual precepts according to tradition. In this way, those challenging him seek to strike at the reliability and authority of Jesus as Teacher because they say: "But this teacher allows his disciples to evade the prescriptions of tradition." But Jesus responds emphatically; he responds by saying: "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men'" (vv. 6-7). This is what Jesus says. Clear and emphatic words! 'Hypocrite' is, so to speak, one of the strongest adjectives that Jesus uses in the Gospel, and he speaks it as he addresses the teachers of religion: doctors of the law, scribes.... 'Hypocrite,' Jesus says.

Indeed, Jesus wants to rouse the scribes and Pharisees from the error they have fallen into. And what is this error? That of distorting God's will, neglecting his commandments in order to observe human traditions. Jesus' reaction is severe because something great is at stake: it concerns the truth of the relationship between man and God, the authenticity of religious life. A hypocrite is a liar; he is not authentic.

Today too, the Lord invites us to avoid the danger of giving more importance to form than to substance. He calls us to recognize, ever anew, what is the true core of the experience of faith, that is, love of God and love of neighbor, by purifying it of the hypocrisy of legalism and ritualism.

Today's Gospel message is also reinforced by the voice of the Apostle James, who tells us, in brief, what *true religion* is meant to be, and he says: pure religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas 1:27). "To

visit orphans and widows” means to practice charity toward neighbors, beginning with the neediest, frailest, most marginalized people. They are the people whom God takes care of in a special way, and he asks us to do the same.

“To keep oneself unstained from the world” does not mean to isolate oneself and close oneself off from reality. No. Here too there must be not an exterior attitude, but interior, substantive: it means being vigilant so that our way of thinking and acting may not be polluted by the worldly mentality, or that of vanity, of greed, of arrogance. Actually, a man or woman who lives in vanity, in greed or in arrogance and at the same time believes and shows him or herself as being religious and even goes so far as to condemn others, is a hypocrite.

Let us make an examination of conscience to see how we embrace the Word of God. On Sunday we listen to it at Mass. If we listen to it in a distracted or superficial way, it will not be of much use. Instead, we must welcome the Word with open minds and hearts, as good soil, in a way that it may be assimilated and may bear fruit in real life. Jesus says that the Word of God is like wheat; it is a seed that must grow in practical deeds. In this way the Word itself purifies our heart and actions, and our relationship with God and with others is freed from hypocrisy.

May the example and intercession of the Virgin Mary help us to always honor the Lord with our heart, witnessing to our love for him in concrete choices for the good of our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis, Angelus, September 2, 2018
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August 29, 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time



First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

Moses said to the people: “Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I enjoin upon you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it. Observe them carefully, for thus will you give evidence of your wisdom and intelligence to the nations, who will hear of all these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise and intelligent people.’ For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him? Or what great nation has statutes and decrees that are as just as this whole law which I am setting before you today?”



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;
who thinks the truth in his heart
and slanders not with his tongue.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who harms not his fellow man,
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;
by whom the reprobate is despised,
while he honors those who fear the LORD.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who lends not his money at usury
and accepts no bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things
shall never be disturbed.

R. The one who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.



Second Reading: James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Dearest brothers and sisters: All good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change. He willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Gospel Acclamation: James 1:18

Alleluia, alleluia. The Father willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

When the Pharisees with some scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus, they observed that some of his disciples ate their meals with unclean, that is, unwashed, hands. —For the Pharisees and, in fact, all Jews, do not eat without carefully washing their hands, keeping the tradition of the elders. And on coming from the marketplace they do not eat without purifying themselves. And there are many other things that they have traditionally observed, the purification of cups and jugs and kettles and beds.— So the Pharisees and scribes questioned him, “Why do your disciples not follow the tradition of the elders but instead eat a meal with unclean hands?” He responded, “Well did Isaiah prophesy about you hypocrites, as it is written:

*This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines human precepts.*

You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.” He summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile.

“From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”



Meditation:

“Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.” So says St. James in today’s second reading. This verse provides us with a thematic anchor for this week’s

pondering. God's word is truly like a seed and we are to receive it with hearts like fertile soil, *humus*, the root word for *humility*.

When we look at a seed, we see only its outward appearance; we cannot see the plant that it will become. This two-fold characteristic of seeds gives us key to understanding the practice of our religion. There is a visible exterior aspect and a hidden interior aspect, with tremendous potential. The Pharisees and scribes in today's Gospel are focused on fulfilling the exterior rituals of purity. They criticize Jesus' disciples for failing to observe all the rules, particularly the requirement about washing one's hands before eating. Our recent preoccupation with hand-washing due to the pandemic may distort our understanding of why these Pharisees are so concerned about "unclean hands." They are not thinking of good hygiene or "safety protocols." Nor are they simply being ritualistic. The Pharisees and scribes were dedicated to adhering perfectly to the Law given through Moses, that is, to all the distinctive tenets of the Jewish religion.

Today's first reading gives us a good reminder of what the Israelites thought about their system of "statutes and decrees." The Law was a precious, God-given treasure, an indication of God's special favor and a path to greatness among the nations. In this passage from Deuteronomy, we read part of Moses' long exhortation to the Israelites. He is about to die, and they are about to enter the Promised Land. The final words of a dying man, especially a man with the stature of Moses, are of immense importance. In fact, the whole Book of Deuteronomy is presented in the form of Moses' final exhortations to the people. One of his very clear instructions is that they must follow the whole system of laws and commandments: "you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it. Observe them carefully...." Among the many instructions of Moses, there are detailed purification rituals (cf. Lev 11-16). The Pharisees and scribes are following them all to the letter – and they expect everyone else to do the same, especially a preacher like Jesus and his disciples.

Rather than praising these legal experts for their faithfulness and zeal, Jesus rebukes them. Why? Because he can see not only their external righteousness but also the condition of their hearts. On the outside are forms of purity and proper worship, but inside lie deceit,

malice, arrogance and folly. When a person's exterior performance does not correspond to what is in his heart, that is *hypocrisy*. Jesus refers these experts back to a prophecy they have already read in the Book of Isaiah: “*This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me...*” (cf. Is 29:13).

The Law that God gave to Moses was never merely a matter of purification rituals. The rituals were given as expressions of the *covenant*, the sacred bond, that God established with his people: “I will be your God; you will be my people.” Without this covenantal relationship, the Law loses its very foundation, and the rituals become showy, empty forms. Jesus, in his rebuke, points out to the Pharisees that in their hearts they have forgotten the covenant, so they “disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition.”

How can we avoid the trap of hypocrisy in the practice of our Christian faith? How can we be faithful to the covenant and ensure that our interior matches our exterior? We turn to the Letter of St. James for the answer. His exhortation today is very clear: “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.” The source of our faith is God, “the Father of lights.” It is not our perfect performance that saves us but his “word of truth,” planted in our hearts, which is able to save our souls. We must allow the word to penetrate us and bear its fruit – not self-righteousness and judgment of others but, as James tells us, “to care for orphans and widows in their affliction.” Love of God is normally expressed in concrete acts of love of neighbor. What about purification rituals? St. James is clear about this as well: “to keep oneself unstained by the world.” That is, our concern must be, not hand-washing but detachment from worldliness and rejection of the impurity of sin. To aim always for greater love, in faithfulness to our covenant of love with God, is the essence of “religion that is pure and undefiled.”

In what ways do I honor the Lord with my lips and not my heart? How do I allow the word to penetrate me and bear fruit and not self-righteousness? How is my faithfulness to my covenant of love to God being manifested in my life?

Mary, may your interior faithfulness to God penetrate my being.

Notes



First Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 96:1 and 3, 4-5, 11-12, 13

The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all you lands.

Tell his glory among the nations;
among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.

For great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
awesome is he, beyond all gods.

For all the gods of the nations are things of nought,
but the LORD made the heavens.

R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;
let the sea and what fills it resound;
let the plains be joyful and all that is in them!

Then shall all the trees of the forest exult.

R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Before the LORD, for he comes;
for he comes to rule the earth.

He shall rule the world with justice
and the peoples with his constancy.

R. The Lord comes to judge the earth.

Gospel Acclamation: see Luke 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Luke 4:16-30

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, “Is this not the son of Joseph?” He said to them, “Surely you will quote me this proverb, ‘Physician, cure yourself,’ and say, ‘Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.’” And he said, “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.



Meditation:

Yesterday, we learned the importance of humbly welcoming the word of God and acting on it. St. James reminded us that listening alone is not enough, and Jesus taught us that good rituals are not enough.

Today’s readings give us another opportunity to welcome the word, that is, to welcome Jesus himself into our hearts. We ponder the sad example of his former neighbors from Nazareth, who show us two

radically different ways of relating to Jesus: acceptance and rejection. The people of Nazareth shift rapidly from one to the other. In one moment, “all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth,” and in the next moment the very same people, filled with fury, “rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill . . . to hurl him down headlong”! Reflecting on what attracted and what offended the townspeople can help us probe our own inner responses to the word and the presence of Jesus in our lives.

There are many reasons why we may find ourselves attracted to the Lord. His mission statement appeals to us. He speaks of bringing “glad tidings to the poor” and “liberty to captives,” fulfilling the ancient prophecies. His presence is both gentle and powerful, like a skilled and tender physician. We too are amazed at his gracious words. But though we sense that Jesus can heal us and satisfy our deepest longings, too often we are caught up in shallower concerns. We are like the woman at the well who at first simply wanted a more convenient source of water (cf. Jn 4:15), or like the people in the crowd who wanted more free loaves of bread (cf. Jn 6:26). If we want to relate to Jesus only on our own terms, we will eventually find ourselves disappointed when he does not do what we expect. We can even grow angry because we feel insulted by his indifference to our plight and by his demands that we repent and change.

Jesus is aware that his old neighbors are looking for signs and wonders but are not ready to welcome a prophet in their midst – much less welcome the long-awaited Messiah. They are infected with the same spiritual disease that so often plagued their ancestors, hardness of heart. This is why Jesus reminds them that “no prophet is accepted in his own native place.” He knows that the superficial desire to see a few miracles will not sustain them when they are confronted with the challenges of faith.

One of these challenges, which we also face, is to accept the presence of God in an ordinary carpenter, the son of Joseph. We have a kind of prejudice against what is familiar to us. We wrongly assume that God must be aloof and extraordinary. There is a reasonable basis for this assumption, since God is certainly above us in every way, and is most

extraordinary, but he has come among us in extraordinary humility. When we forget this basic fact, or resist it, we close the eyes of our hearts to most of what God is saying and doing each day. He is present in the beauty of creation as it unfolds all around us. He is especially present in each “ordinary” person – the carpenters and the street sweepers, the drivers and the passengers, the senior citizens and the little children. When God became man in Jesus Christ, he made himself present in each person. In this Year of St. Joseph, we have an opportunity to learn more deeply how to accept the humble “son of Joseph” as the true Son of God, as Joseph of Nazareth did.

Another challenge to the life of faith is our misperception that God favors other people more than he favors us. Jesus mentions the miracles done for two foreigners, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian. Instead of giving thanks for God’s goodness to them, the Nazarenes are offended at the suggestion that some lowly pagans are better than they are. Jealousy is always irrational and blinding. It prevents us from seeing the presence and goodness of God in our midst. The people refuse to put up with Jesus’ “insults.” They decide to cast him out of their lives. However, the real effect of opposing God, whether we try to cast him out or merely try to ignore him, is that we harm ourselves, not God. Jesus walks away from Nazareth unhurt, but the people are left in the darkness of their unbelief and hardness of heart. Their pride is intact; their faith is not. They have rejected the very Source of salvation.

While the Gospel speaks of Jesus’ going away, St. Paul’s message to the Thessalonians speaks of his coming again in glory. “The Lord himself ... will come down from heaven.” The best way to prepare for this future event is to live the present in faith. If we are welcoming the Lord in our hearts today, we will be ready to welcome him tomorrow. We look forward to his coming, for we long to be with him. Paul advises us to “console one another” with the message that Christ will come again in glory. It is a great consolation indeed. The sorrows of this life, including the sorrows we have caused by our own sins, will come to an end. We are not living like those “who have no hope,” nor like the people of Nazareth who have no faith. Strengthened by the word of God, we persevere in faith, hope and love, looking forward to eternal life.

How does jealousy prevent me from seeing the presence and goodness of God in my midst? How is my life affected when I reject God or try to ignore him? How does my hope and love in God's word strengthen my faith?

Mary, strengthen me to allow the word to take root in my heart.

Notes



First Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11

Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. When people are saying, “Peace and security,” then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober. For God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14

***I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life’s refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

***R. I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

One thing I ask of the LORD;
this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD
and contemplate his temple.

***R. I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

***R. I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord
in the land of the living.***

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 7:16

Alleluia, alleluia. A great prophet has arisen in our midst and God has visited his people. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 4:31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee. He taught them on the sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man with the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out in a loud voice, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be quiet! Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down in front of them and came out of him without doing him any harm. They were all amazed and said to one another, “What is there about his word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” And news of him spread everywhere in the surrounding region.



Meditation:

On Sunday, we pondered the importance of allowing the word to take root in our hearts. Yesterday, we saw that resistance to the word leads to excluding ourselves from the presence of God. When we live in hypocrisy, or hardness of heart, or indifference, we lose our living connection with God; we weaken the very foundation of our hope. Then fear can begin to take over our lives, especially when we come face to face with something that is beyond our control. Today’s readings remind us that we do not have to be in control, for we are under the watchful authority of God. Humility and faith are powerful antidotes to the fear and anxiety that dominate the world.

St. Paul addresses the problem of fear. The Thessalonians are afraid because they know that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night” but they do not know exactly when. They are afraid of being caught off guard. This kind of fear – fear of the unknown future, fear of calamities, fear of death – is common. None of us knows when we will die, or when the Lord will come again. It is true that Jesus will come to us like a thief; he even described himself this way in the Gospels. “Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour when the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come” (Lk 12:39-40).

However, knowing that “the thief” is coming does not mean we must live in perpetual fear – for we know that he is not really a thief. He comes not to take from us but to give. Paul points out that there is a vast difference between those who are “of the night or of darkness” and those who are “children of the light and children of the day.” People who are still in darkness, the darkness caused by unrepented sin, are right to be afraid, for they are at risk of being caught off guard. In this case, their fear can benefit them, if it moves them to repent and seek the Lord.

We who have been rescued from darkness have no more need for such fear. Do we think that our Father is out to destroy us? Nonsense! “God did not destine us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus died for us all, so that we may live with him. This is our faith. We still experience natural emotional ups and downs, all our desires and fears, but they do not overwhelm or control us. Jesus is more powerful than everything we fear, even death itself. By faith, our hearts are convinced that we “shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living.” The words of today’s Psalm explain exactly why we do not live in fear: “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life’s refuge; of whom should I be afraid?”

The Gospel gives us another insight into the problem of fear. Fear grips the unclean spirit who has possessed a man in the synagogue of Nazareth. The demon cries out, “Have you come to destroy us?” One of the reasons we can still experience fear is that part of our fallen nature still tends to align itself with the powers of darkness. We are not possessed, and we have no desire to be evil, yet the evil one keeps planting suspicions in our hearts. He tries to get us to think that God may be out to “destroy us,” that maybe God is not always on our side, that he is not telling us the whole truth and that we have to take care of ourselves rather than rely too much on him. When our faith is strong, we can quickly identify and cast out these lies, but when we weaken, fear creeps back in.

To make progress in the struggle between faith and fear, we must make a conscious effort to allow the word of God to penetrate the depths of our hearts – to shine divine light in every dark corner, to drive out every fear and doubt. God’s word is more powerful than any lie. The Gospel shows us the power of the word in action. What impresses the onlookers most is the authority of Jesus’ word. “What is there about his

word?” (In Greek, their question is literally, “What word – *logos* – is this?”) A demon may seem powerful to us, but to the Lord, a demon is pathetically weak. There is no real contest between them. The demon knows he is defeated before he even speaks. Jesus casts him out with a word of command, with absolute authority. The lesson to us is once again that we have nothing to fear, as long as we place ourselves under the authority of the Lord.

St. Paul reminds us that this confidence should move us to “encourage one another and build one another up.” Since we believe in the power of the divine word, it is only fitting that we courageously spread the word in every way we can. The world is in dire need of a word that heals, consoles and inspires. People in darkness, deceived by the false light of fading pleasures, are longing for the transforming power of the “good news,” the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

How does hypocrisy and hardness of heart cause me to lose my living connection with God? I am not possessed, yet what are the suspicions that the devil plants in my heart against God? What is hindering me to make progress in the struggle between faith and fear in my life?

Mary, may I always long for the transforming power of the “good news”, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notes

September 1, Wednesday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time
World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation



First Reading: Colossians 1:1-8

Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy ones and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the Gospel, that has come to you. Just as in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, so also among you, from the day you heard it and came to know the grace of God in truth, as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow slave, who is a trustworthy minister of Christ on your behalf and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 52:10, 11

I trust in the mercy of God for ever.

I, like a green olive tree
in the house of God,
Trust in the mercy of God
forever and ever.

R. I trust in the mercy of God for ever.

I will thank you always for what you have done,
and proclaim the goodness of your name
before your faithful ones.

R. I trust in the mercy of God for ever.

Gospel Acclamation: Luke 4:18

Alleluia, alleluia. The Lord sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim liberty to captives. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 4:38-44

After Jesus left the synagogue, he entered the house of Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was afflicted with a severe fever, and they interceded with him about her. He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them.

At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on each of them and cured them. And demons also came out from many, shouting, "You are the Son of God."

But he rebuked them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ.

At daybreak, Jesus left and went to a deserted place. The crowds went looking for him, and when they came to him, they tried to prevent him from leaving them. But he said to them, “To the other towns also I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent.” And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.



Meditation:

The Kingdom of God grows and spreads when we humbly welcome the word of God and serve our neighbor according to the Father’s will for us. This is clear from both of today’s readings, which invite us to reflect on the quality of our own service to God.

Our model is Jesus himself. In today’s Gospel, he places himself at the service of the people of Capernaum, healing them and driving out demons. He uses his power, which is obviously very great, for the good of the needy. One of the effects of Jesus’ ministry is that he rapidly becomes popular as a healer. However, since he has not come simply to impress people or to attract admirers, he withdraws from the crowds. In humble submission to the will of his Father, he goes to other towns to do what he was sent to do: “proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God.”

The example of Jesus shows us that we too must be ready to go to “other towns” – that is, we must be ready to move beyond our comfort zones and familiar patterns, so that we can serve others who are in need of the “good news of the Kingdom of God.” Jesus’ example also teaches us to evaluate the fruitfulness of our ministry not by how much we accomplish or by how popular we are, but only by how well we are fulfilling the will of God.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus, St. Paul also places himself at the service of the Church. Today we read the beginning of his Letter to the Colossians. The church in Colossae was not founded by Paul but by his “beloved fellow slave,” Epaphras, another “trustworthy minister of Christ.” Paul gives a brief outline of how the Church actually grows. It grows by the power of God, not man. When the word of God, “the word of truth,” is proclaimed, it fills the hearts of the listeners with the virtues of faith, hope and love: “faith in Christ Jesus,” “love ... for all the holy ones,” and “hope reserved for you in heaven.”

Since Paul has never even been to Colossae, none of this church's growth can be attributed to him. In any case, he has no thought of claiming credit. His mission is not for himself but for the Lord. He is not even thinking of himself. He gives thanks to God for giving new life in faith to "the holy ones and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae." When we recognize that our ministry, whatever it may be, is a small participation in the great work that God is doing in and through his people, we can better cooperate with the Holy Spirit. We will not take ourselves too seriously. We can be free of envy and jealousy, and give thanks to God for his abundant merciful love.

A special case of ministry is highlighted in the Gospel, that of Simon's mother-in-law. (This was before Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter.) The event is so simply told that we may not even notice this unnamed woman's beautiful example of humble service. True humility often goes unnoticed – and truly humble people do not mind being overlooked. When Jesus comes to her home, she is very sick, "afflicted with a severe fever." Through the intercession of her son-in-law, she finds herself at the feet of the Lord. Jesus rebukes the fever and it leaves. The Gospel records no word spoken between the Lord and the woman. Her response is her service. She immediately gets up and waits on them. This is her way of giving thanks. There is a chain-reaction of humble service: because Jesus served her, she can serve him; because she serves him, he can serve the many others who come to her house. After this incident, Simon's mother-in-law is never mentioned again in the Bible.

Like Simon's mother-in-law, we build the Kingdom of God by doing his will, humbly, quietly, simply. This is also the lesson we can learn from St. Joseph in this Year dedicated to him. His witness in the Gospels is a silent one and can easily go unnoticed. We testify to our faith in both words and deeds, but, as the saying goes, actions speak louder than words. Most of our Christian service takes place in our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces. By the example of our daily lives we can spread faith to others.

In what ways do I move beyond my comfort zones and familiar patterns to serve those in need? How do I express my gratitude to God for his abundant merciful love? In imitation of the mother-in-law of Simon, how do I humbly and quietly build the Kingdom of God?

Mary, enable me to be always open to the challenges that occur daily in my life.

The late Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios 1 inaugurated the first Day of Prayer for Creation for the Orthodox Church in 1989. As the years passed, other communities adopted this practice. In August of 2015, Pope Francis inaugurated September 1 as the **World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation** for the worldwide Roman Catholic Church. In 2019, he officially invited the faithful to participate in this annual “season of increased prayer and effort on behalf of our common home.” Pope Francis said, “The annual World Day for the Care of Creation offers to individual believers and to the community a precious opportunity to renew our participation in this vocation as custodians of creation, raising to God our thanks for the marvelous works that He has entrusted to our care, invoking his help for the protection of creation and his mercy for the sins committed against the world in which we live.” He asks us “to celebrate this opportune moment to “reaffirm (our) personal vocation to be stewards of creation, to thank God for the wonderful handiwork which he has entrusted to our care.”

This World Day of Prayer also falls at the beginning of the Season of Creation which runs until October 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. This is an ecumenical season dedicated to prayer for the protection of creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. This date is significant to Christians who observe the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of living creatures.

Notes



First Reading: Colossians 1:9-14

Brothers and sisters: From the day we heard about you, we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:2-3ab, 3cd-4, 5-6
The Lord has made known his salvation.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. The Lord has made known his salvation.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.
Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
break into song; sing praise.

R. The Lord has made known his salvation.

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and melodious song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

R. The Lord has made known his salvation.

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 4:19

Alleluia, alleluia. Come after me, says the Lord, and I will make you fishers of men. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 5:1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were

washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that the boats were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.



Meditation:

We continue this week’s reflection on humbly welcoming the word of God, this time by pondering the humble and faithful response of Simon Peter to the call of Jesus. In yesterday’s Gospel, Jesus entered Simon’s house. Simon saw him cure countless people, including Simon’s own mother-in-law, and heard the demons cry out at Jesus, “You are the Son of God!” The practical, hard-working fisherman already knew there was something extraordinary about this man Jesus, but he did not immediately decide to follow him. In today’s Gospel, Jesus enters Simon’s life again; he gets into his boat. Simon cannot simply remain a respectful observer any longer, especially when Jesus makes a direct request of him: “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

We can imagine ourselves in Simon’s place. The Lord surprises us by entering into our “boat,” which is our daily life and activities. Suddenly, we are aware that we are in his presence, and so we can no longer simply go about business as usual. The Lord asks us to take a step in faith, to go further, to take the risk of going toward the “deep water” of a personal relationship with him. Once we hear his invitation, the choice is ours. If we refuse, if we remain in the shallow water, near the comfort and security of the shoreline, we will not be able to see the depths of his goodness and mercy.

We always have many “good reasons” not to do what God says. Simon Peter has reasonable objections of his own. Ours are basically the same. *I have worked all night. I’m tired. I already know this won’t work. This is not a good time to try your idea. Maybe some other day, when I’m not so busy. It is a waste of time to keep going....* We do not voice our deeper objections, but they are part of why we hesitate: we are afraid of failure; we are ashamed to look like a fool in front of our friends. Like Simon, we can also feel the weight of our own limitations and fears.

Simon, however, is humble enough to leap over all his objections. He makes an act of obedient faith. “At your command, I will lower the nets.” He does not base his decision on reason alone, for the request in fact seems unreasonable. But he judges that the One who makes the request is trustworthy. Therefore it is not unreasonable to do as he says: “At your command....” Simon’s humble act of faith is immediately rewarded with two boats full of countless fish. The abundance is obviously not the fruit of Simon’s efforts, for he and his companions have worked all night and caught nothing. Simon realizes that Jesus has worked a great sign on his behalf, and he takes a second step of humility, the acknowledgment of his unworthiness: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

We must take this step, too. We cannot grow in faith if we do not admit our sin. Saying, “Depart from me, Lord,” does not mean that we really want him to leave, for in our hearts, we want him to stay. We are simply acknowledging what strict justice requires. We have no right to divine favors. We do not deserve to be in God’s presence, or to receive his love and mercy. Still, we remain hopeful that he will bless us anyway.

In Simon’s case, the Lord shows his love by calling him to become a “fisher of men.” Here Simon rises to the occasion with another act of great humility and confident faith. This step follows the two that he has already taken, that is, his decision to trust Jesus’ word and his confession of his sinfulness. Now he leaves everything behind to follow Jesus. Simon’s journey of faith has begun!

We are on the same journey, leaving our old life behind to follow the will of God. It is an adventure with endless new insights and challenges. St. Paul, in writing to the Colossians about the faith journey,

reminds us that we have already been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of God. Through Christ, “we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.” Thus we have much more to look forward to than what we have left behind. The tangled nets of our past are nothing compared to being made worthy “to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light.” If we continue to humble ourselves before the Lord, he can continue to exalt us. He draws us toward the “deep water” of being “filled with the knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” On our own strength, we can do nothing, we can catch nothing; in Christ, we can be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God.”

As Jesus enters into my boat daily, what are some of the surprises he manifested in my life? What causes my faith to waver and thus unable to see the depths of God’s goodness and mercy? In my walk with the Lord, what are some of the “good reasons” to not do what God says?

Mary, my model of faith, sustain me on my faith journey to eternal life.

Notes

September 3, Friday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time
Saint Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor of the Church



First Reading: Colossians 1:15-20

Brothers and sisters:

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;
all things were created through him and for him.

He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the Body, the Church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.

For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the Blood of his cross through him,
whether those on earth or those in heaven.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100:1b-2, 3, 4, 5

Come with joy into the presence of the Lord.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands;
serve the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful song.

R. Come with joy into the presence of the Lord.

Know that the LORD is God;
he made us, his we are;
his people, the flock he tends.

R. Come with joy into the presence of the Lord.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
his courts with praise;

Give thanks to him; bless his name.

R. Come with joy into the presence of the Lord.

For he is good,
the LORD, whose kindness endures forever,
and his faithfulness, to all generations.

R. Come with joy into the presence of the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the light of the world, says the Lord; whoever follows me will have the light of life. ***Alleluia, alleluia.***



Gospel: Luke 5:33-39

The scribes and Pharisees said to Jesus, “The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and offer prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but yours eat and drink.” Jesus answered them, “Can you make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.” And he also told them a parable. “No one tears a piece from a new cloak to patch an old one. Otherwise, he will tear the new and the piece from it will not match the old cloak. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. And no one who has been drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’”



Meditation:

What words can describe the fullness of who Christ Jesus really is? Today’s Gospel describes him using symbols. He is a *groom* at his wedding feast; he is a *new wine* that will burst out of an old container. The first reading relies on more lofty language, describing Christ as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” the “head of the Body, the Church,” and “the firstborn of the dead.” None of these descriptions can perfectly capture the whole mystery of the Lord, but we can glimpse two main aspects of his identity: he is both with us and beyond us. He is both someone with whom we can have a real relationship, like a bride with her groom, and he is above and beyond all relationships, the foundation of everything. He is both a Person to love and a God to adore, at the same time.

The scribes and Pharisees have put Jesus in the same category as other preachers and holy men. To them, he is something like John the Baptist, or indeed like themselves, the professional religious leaders of the day. So they naturally expect his disciples to act like the disciples of every other such leader. Implied in their observation about fasting is a judgment against Jesus and his disciples: they do not fast; therefore they must be less holy. The problem of the Pharisees is not with their reasoning but with their first premise. Jesus is *not* the same as every other preacher. He is in an entirely different category – in fact, he surpasses all categories. They really have no idea who they are talking to.

Knowing that their view of him is impossibly narrow, Jesus refers to a metaphor that would be familiar to them. The prophets often spoke of the relationship between God and his people Israel as a marriage. Using

this very image, Jesus identifies himself as the Groom. In his presence, it makes no sense to fast. The wedding of God and his people should be marked with joyful feasting, not fasting.

This revelation should have been a shocking eye-opener to Jesus' listeners – after all, here Jesus is clearly taking the place of the Groom, that is, God himself! – but they seem not to have understood what he said at all. Their narrow categories of thought cannot contain the new reality he is revealing to them. Seeing the confusion on their faces, he turns to more familiar images, trying to get them to realize that something entirely new is present among them. New things, like a new coat or new wine, cannot be combined with old things. The new life Jesus brings us cannot be combined with our old ways. If we try to combine the Christian life of faith with the old life according to the Law, we will end up with nothing: the wine “will be spilled, and the skins will be ruined.”

We are called to be the containers, the “wineskins,” of divine life. Of course we cannot contain God. Even the whole created universe is too small to contain him! And yet, because God wants to live within us, he himself makes the impossible possible. He makes himself part of his own creation by taking on our human nature, and he makes us “fresh wineskins” by re-creating us through Baptism. He has reconciled all things, “making peace by the Blood of his cross.” Earth is reconciled with Heaven. Man is reconciled with God. Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it really is possible for us to bear the new wine of divine life. The model we follow is the Virgin Mary, whose lowliness and sinlessness made her the perfect wineskin for the Lord.

As we ponder who has come to dwell within us, we are struck with awe and fear. Who could ever claim to be worthy of communion with the One in whom absolute fullness resides? On the other hand, even though we are unworthy, how can we dare to refuse his offer of sharing life with us? The readings make us think more deeply of what happens when we receive the Holy Eucharist. The One in whom everything continues in being comes to dwell in us! We become sacred temples of the Most Holy God. Thinking of this gives us renewed conviction not to return to our old ways, for fear of losing the gift we have received. Anything that does not belong to the new life – grudges, impurity, greed, resentment, etc. – is intolerable. No faithful bride would accept even the slightest hint of adultery, and we are the bride of Christ.

The last line of the Gospel seems puzzling at first; it seems to imply that the old wine is better than the new. But no, Jesus is actually warning us that if we keep drinking the “old wine” of sin and selfishness, we will no longer desire the “new wine” of divine life. Our flesh, represented by the self-satisfied and judgmental Pharisees, keeps saying, “The old is good.” It is from this tendency that we must still fast, so that we will never compromise our fidelity to the Lord our Groom.

How do I experience the Lord as both a Person to love and a God to adore? In what ways do I strip myself of my old ways to live the new life of Jesus in faith? How do grudges, impurity, greed and resentment hinder my relationship with Christ?

Mary, in your lowliness and sinlessness, inspire me to bear the new wine of divine life.

St. Gregory the Great, pray for us.

Gregory the Great was born in Rome in 540 to a family of saints. During his life he went from being Prefect of Rome to being a Benedictine abbot, and later became the first monk to be chosen as pope (590-604). One of the four great Doctors of the Latin Church, Gregory’s name is forever connected with the development of the Church’s greatest sacred music, Gregorian chant. He was responsible for re-energizing the Church’s missionary efforts, including the evangelization of England. In the midst of all his accomplishments, Gregory remained a deeply contemplative man. “In that silence of heart, while we keep watch within through contemplation, we are as if asleep to all things that are without.” He summed up the responsibilities of his office by describing the pope as the “servant of the servants of God.”

Notes

September 4, Saturday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time



First Reading: Colossians 1:21-23

Brothers and sisters: You once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds; God has now reconciled you in the fleshly Body of Christ through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him, provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, am a minister.



Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 54:3-4, 6 and 8

God himself is my help.

O God, by your name save me,
and by your might defend my cause.
O God, hear my prayer;
hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. God himself is my help.

Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord sustains my life.

Freely will I offer you sacrifice;

I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.

R. God himself is my help.

Gospel Acclamation: John 14:6

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the way and the truth and the life, says the Lord; no one comes to the Father except through me. **Alleluia, alleluia.**



Gospel: Luke 6:1-5

While Jesus was going through a field of grain on a sabbath, his disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the sabbath?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Have you not read what David did when he and those who were with him were hungry? How he went into the house of God, took the bread of offering, which only the priests could lawfully eat, ate of it, and shared it with his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath."



Meditation:

St. Paul presents us with a kind of “before and after” picture of our spiritual condition. Before we were touched by the grace of conversion, we were alienated from Christ. We were “alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds.” This is a good description of the effect of sin. It alienates us; that is, it isolates us, separates us from the Lord and from one another. When we give in to sin, we choose a path of hostility, bitterness, and division. The illusion of every temptation is that sin will make things better and we will be happier, but the temptation is always a lie. Sin always harms us and those whom we love.

The ugliness of the “before” condition is more than reversed by the beauty of the “after” condition. We are no longer under the reign of sin! We do not have to remain enslaved to the destructive tendencies of our fallen nature. Paul proclaims this good news: “God has now reconciled you in the fleshly Body of Christ through his death, to present you holy, without blemish, and irreproachable before him.” We can never tire of rejoicing in this basic truth of our faith: Christ Jesus has died so that we may live. He humbled himself so that we may be exalted.

The possibility of slipping back into sin always remains with us in this life. Some Christians believe that once we have accepted Christ as our Savior, we can never be lost. This “once saved, always saved” position is not taught by the Bible or the Church. The love of God never changes, but we can change. We can reject what we have accepted; we can lose what we have found. Otherwise Paul would not have to add this warning: “... provided that you persevere in the faith, firmly grounded, stable, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel that you heard.” We can still be lured into the trap of trying to exalt ourselves. If we do, we only interfere with the saving work of Christ. He is the one to exalt us, and he can do so only if we humble ourselves. The reason Jesus is so critical of the sin of hypocrisy, as we saw in last Sunday’s Gospel, is that it puffs us up with a false righteousness, leaving us cut off from the power of God’s mercy.

One way that we try to exalt ourselves is by putting others down. We tell ourselves – not out loud, of course, only in the secret of our hearts – that if we are better than someone else, then it proves that we

are good. The possibility that we could be just as bad as those whom we judge, or even worse, does not even occur to us. This common mindset is exposed very well in the comment of the Pharisees in today's Gospel. They self-righteously accuse Jesus' disciples of violating the Sabbath. What is the grave offense? Picking a few grains of wheat. We can almost hear the Pharisees' tone of voice, with the implied message, *We would never do what they are doing! Oh, how wicked! They are certainly to be numbered among the tax collectors and prostitutes!*

Their reaction strikes us as ridiculous, partly because it is so exaggerated. Another reason it seems odd to us is that in our times we go to the opposite extreme in our non-observance of the Lord's Day each week. For the Pharisees, almost any activity could be considered a violation of the Sabbath, but for us, almost nothing is considered a violation of the Lord's Day. The main point, however, is that, though we do not share the strict religious position of the Pharisees, we all share their tendency to judge others. It is much easier for us to look at the outer behavior of others and stand in judgment than to look at our own interior life and humbly acknowledge our sins. So we do this all the time. We can easily identify many people as "sinners." Often our judgment is inaccurate because we do not know all the factors, but even if we are correct in some way, it does not make us holier than anyone else.

Jesus' way of correcting the judgmental Pharisees is to point to the example of King David, whom they rightly esteem so highly. Strictly speaking, David broke the Law – he did what the Law forbade him to do – but without incurring guilt. The lesson is simply that we should not be so quick to assume others are guilty, based on our superficial observations and our need to prove ourselves righteous. We may end up condemning the innocent and making ourselves guilty. We are not to go backward, into the "before" condition of sin, but forward, into the new life of holiness. Our faith is not directed toward condemnation but salvation.

When do I choose a path of hostility, bitterness and division which separates me from God? In what ways does the sin of hypocrisy puff me up with a false righteousness? When do I go backward into the "before" condition of sin and not forward into the new life of grace?

Mary, grant me the grace not to be judgmental of others.

Notes