

Sunday Homily Helps Lectern Guide

INTRODUCTIONS TO PENITENTIAL RITE AND READINGS, MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE is a model which can also be adapted for use as an introduction to the liturgy itself. The INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS, if read by priest or lector before the respective readings, are intended to focus the attention of the listeners. The MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS relate to the theme of the homily outline and may be used to supplement the usual petitions.

September 6, 2020 — 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: When we were baptized, we were called to be prophets as Jesus was. For the times when we have been unwilling to live out our prophetic vocation, we ask God's mercy.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, God gives a prophet a very important assignment. The lives of others depends on the word he speaks.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, the Lord's new command to love one another fulfills all the commandments of old.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples on how to deal with a serious sinner within the structure of the community.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For our family, friends, and neighbors,
- 2) For those who need to be forgiven,
- 3) For all who are in pain because of another's sin,
- 4) That the Church model on earth the love of Jesus Christ,

September 13, 2020— 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: For the times we have not been merciful and forgiving to those who have hurt us, we ask forgiveness.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a wise teacher urges us to extend to others the forgiveness we seek from God.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, we are reminded that we belong to Christ the Lord in life and in death.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus proclaims that forgiveness must be perpetual, and he exemplifies this through his parable of the unforgiving servant.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS:

- 1) That our country's leaders promote the common good and seek to reconcile those who stand in

opposition to one another,

- 2) That Pope Francis and our Church leaders courageously stand against those who s act in opposition to the Gospel,
- 3) That we let go of resentment and humbly seek reconciliation,
- 4) For the Father will welcome home with great joy all those who have died,

September 20, 2020 — 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: To prepare to celebrate this beautiful sacrament, we look honestly into ourselves and recognize our sinfulness. We ask God to forgive us our sins and restore us to grace.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet reminds us that the ways of God are very different from the ways of the world.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul longs to be with the Lord. But while he is on earth, he is grateful to preach the Gospel to people.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus challenges his followers to be merciful and just in ways that flow from the kingdom of heaven rather than from the kingdom of Caesar.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For our Holy Father Francis as he leads us in the ways of peace and goodness,
- 2) That world, national and local leaders continue to work for the common good,
- 3) In thanksgiving for all healthcare workers, especially for their dedication to healing the sick,
- 4) For all those who have died, especially from the COVID-19 virus,

September 27, 2020 — 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: God invites us to accept responsibility for what we can change and to

work with others for the changes that require their help.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet wants the people to understand they are not trapped by the past. The present offers a chance for repentance.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, we are reminded that Jesus accepted suffering and death for the sake of our salvation.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus teaches through the parable of the two sons that fulfilling the will of God demands action over words.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For the safety of students, teachers, and staff members during this new school year,
- 2) For all those preparing for the birth of children,
- 3) For all those preparing to adopt a child,
- 4) For God's help to fulfill our responsibilities to ourselves and to others,

Sunday Homily Helps

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #127

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

At this point in the book, Ezekiel's assignment from God is nearing an end. In a few short verses, news will reach the exiles in Babylon that the great city of Jerusalem has fallen. The prophet has given many warnings that such a terrible thing will happen. But the people still refused to heed his words. Now it is almost too late. Yet even at this 11th hour, God restates how important it is for Ezekiel to continue in his prophetic role.

1) *Warning.* God reminds Ezekiel that he has the great responsibility of serving as a watchman over the people. *Watchman* is an especially appropriate title for a prophet. Like a watchman in a tower, Ezekiel has a commanding view of any approaching danger. In his case the danger is a spiritual one. Because he serves the court of heaven, Ezekiel is fully aware of the consequences that will follow if the people remain unfaithful to their covenant with God. It is his responsibility to sound the alarm, giving the people plenty of time to realize the danger and change their ways.

2) *Ignored.* At this point in Ezekiel's service to God, it seems unlikely that the people will turn away from idolatry. For this reason the likelihood of preserving their lives is not even mentioned. All the emphasis falls on death; they will die for their guilt. Yet even though this sad outcome is becoming more and more probable, Ezekiel must still continue sounding the alarm. The people may die for ignoring his word. But Ezekiel will have faithfully carried out the task God has given him. The rest is up to those to whom he gave warning.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Romans 13:8-10

1) *Commandments.* Paul reviews the laws given by Moses to the people of Israel. The apostle begins with only a few of them.

2) *Fulfilled.* Paul, however, wants the faithful to know that all the laws are fulfilled by obeying the Lord's simple command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

Community discipline was a very important issue for

the early Christians. Disputes and conflicts should be handled within the Christian community. The goal is to stay out of the secular courts at all cost. Today's Gospel shows us how Matthew's Church dealt with such challenges. The kind of sin presupposed in this situation is serious, the type that left unattended could seriously damage the community. Finally, sin of this kind was never understood to be a private matter for the individual to work out. Matthew here proposes a threefold process for dealing with serious sin.

1) *The first approach should be that the sinner and the one sinned against should work this out between them.* This is the ideal solution involving mutual responsibility and reconciliation. It is also the solution that requires the most maturity. Needless to say, this ideal solution is not always possible.

2) *The second approach involves witnesses.* Here the one sinned against elicits the aid of one or two additional community members. Two people were required to constitute a legal witness. The purpose here is not to overwhelm the sinner but rather to establish accurately the facts of the situation. Things are not always remembered as they factually happened, and the witnesses can hopefully assist in establishing the truth. But again, this is about serious sin; therefore, even witnesses may not be able to bring about resolution.

3) *The third approach is to bring the matter to the entire local Church.* This is a very serious move and constitutes the last effort to correct the sinner within the structure of the community. If this does not work, then comes the final blow of excommunication. Expelling the sinner from the Church is extremely serious. It is hoped that the sinner then will finally come to a self-realization of the matter, leading to repentance and a return to the Church. The goal is always to get the sinner to repent and return. Matthew makes it clear that the Church indeed has the authority to make all these moves. Authority has been given to the entire Church to bind and to loose. This power is neither taken lightly nor used without careful discernment. There is much to be learned from Jesus' threefold approach in Matthew's Gospel.

PURPOSE: Love of God, self, and neighbor forms the core of who we are and what we do as Christians.

SUMMARY: A prophet is not afraid to engage, to confront and admonish when necessary, and above all, to love his or her neighbor because we and they are God's children.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: What does it mean to be a prophet today? It might all boil down to how we love our neighbor. It's the great commandment: Love God and our neighbor as ourselves. You could spend a lifetime trying to do these three things and nothing else, and still not reach the goal. Perhaps it is life's greatest process.

B) APPLICATION: Each reading today looks at love of neighbor in different ways. God tells Ezekiel to continue warning the people of Jerusalem about their sins lest their blood be on his hands. Paul tells the Romans, "Love is the fulfillment of the law." Matthew encourages us to seek reconciliation with anyone who sins against us; then he gives us three ways to do so.

1) As children of God and believers in Jesus Christ, our actions must mirror what Jesus taught while on earth.

- a) Even when the outcome is certain—that the people of Jerusalem will not be saved—God instructs Ezekiel to continue warning the people to repent and turn back to the Lord so that their blood will not be on Ezekiel's hands.
- b) Being a prophet is a difficult task. We are not those who stand on street corners and yell, "Repent." We do not nag people and constantly correct them. We are all called to be prophets, faithful witnesses to the word of God in word and action.
- c) Full, conscious participation in our everyday life reflects what we celebrate as a community at Sunday Mass. Understanding God's presence in each of us prompts us to live differently, not simply stumbling blindly through life.
- d) Each day offers an opportunity to realize more deeply God's love for us, giving us another chance to turn from sin and embrace the light of God, who never turns his back on us.

2) The power of community is emphasized in the last

line in today's Gospel: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

- a) Jesus' life and teaching were all about community. Paul continued and built upon this idea as he worked with the early—often disparate—Christian communities.
 - b) Successful Christian communities must be guided by love of God, self, and neighbor.
 - c) Our culture's deep-rooted individualism has been tested by the events of this past year. We have learned how much we depend on each other, especially in difficult circumstances.
 - d) God's love does not fail, particularly when we call on him as "two or three" in his name.
- 3) Forgiveness is a difficult concept to grasp. Do we act as if nothing has happened? Pretend that we are not hurt or wronged? Ignore the one who sinned against us?**
- a) It is hard for most of us to imagine how a parent who has lost a child to murder can forgive the killer, or someone who has lost everything can forgive the one who caused that to happen. Yet to remain "bound" to our loss and pain sentences us more than it does the one who committed the sin.
 - b) *Loose* is a beautiful synonym for forgive. To let go, to loosen the bond—what could be more freeing? Jesus gave his disciples the power to bind and to loose. How often do we choose to bind more than to loose?
 - c) Matthew's prescription for dealing with one who has sinned involves dialogue and witness. It is an approach that is not emotional but "established on the testimony of two or three witnesses," if a one-to-one conversation does not work.
 - d) God's absolute forgiveness is passed on to each of us. What we "bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever [we] loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST: "Leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:24).

(Mary Carol Kendzia)

Sunday Homily Helps

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #130

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Sirach 27:30—28:7

The sound spiritual advice within this book derives from the teachings of a wise man who compiled his insights in the early part of the second century before Christ. Years later, this teacher's grandson translated the book into Greek, thereby making it available to a wider audience. In the preface to his translation, this grandson recalls that Sirach wanted to help observers of the law of Moses make even greater progress in their devotion to God. In this portion of the book, Sirach continues contrasting the ways of the ungodly with the ways of the righteous.

1) *Anger*. Sirach says the wicked cling to anger and thoughts of revenge. He notes how irrational this is, given that the fact that anger and revenge are themselves hateful things. Why then would anyone choose to hug them close? Furthermore, those who embrace anything so very contrary to the law should remember they are mere mortals, subject to death and decay. How can they take for granted that God sustains them in life, when at the same time they refuse to value the lives of others and offer them forgiveness?

2) *Mercy*. Sirach cautions proud and hateful people against imagining that their wicked deeds go unnoticed by the Lord of all. He reminds them that God, in fact, remembers every detail of sinful deeds. Sirach also reminds the proud and the hateful about their need for God's forgiveness. Extending mercy and compassion to fellow human beings seems a small thing when the mercy and compassion of God are much more lasting and significant. In view of all this, it seems a minor thing to overlook the faults of others.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Romans 14:7-9

1) *Life*. Because Christ died and came to life, he is Lord of the living. Thus, throughout our lives we are responsible to Christ

2) *Death*. Because Christ won the victory over death he is Lord of both the living and the dead. Thus, we die as servants of the risen Lord.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

Two divine qualities that appear frequently in the

Old Testament are mercy and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6-7). These same characteristics are also exemplified in Jesus, the Son of God. Today's Gospel, therefore, focuses on these themes. Jesus tells Peter that forgiveness must be unlimited, showing this by telling a parable about an unforgiving servant.

1) *How often must I forgive?* Rabbis of Jesus' time often debated this question. While there was no final agreement, the general approach concluded that one should forgive an offender a maximum of three times. That was considered generous. Peter certainly feels that he has raised the bar significantly by suggesting that one should forgive an offender seven times. Imagine the shock when Jesus responds that seven times is not near enough. One must forgive another 77 times, a way of saying "an unlimited amount of times." Jesus illustrates this by telling a parable about an unforgiving servant and his fate.

2) *A king and his servant*. The parable begins with a king who decides to settle accounts with his servants, one of whom was astronomically indebted to the king. There was never a question of paying back such an amount. The servant apparently thought he would not get caught, but he was wrong. Without any emotion the king orders everything the servant has to be confiscated and sold, including his property and family members. However, when the servant pleads to the king for compassion and mercy, he receives it. The king totally forgives the servant's debt and lets him go.

3) *The servant and his fellow servant*. A similar situation is now told involving the same servant upon whom the king had shown mercy and forgiveness. When that servant encounters a fellow servant who owes him only a modest amount, he demands full payment immediately. The fellow servant pleads for mercy but gets none. All of this is reported to the king, who confronts the first servant about his total lack of mercy and forgiveness. That servant forfeits the mercy and forgiveness he has received from the king. Mercy and forgiveness cannot be earned. They come from the heart and know no limitations.

PURPOSE: We keep our hurts and delights in our memories. These memories reveal that God keeps his promise, no matter how often we turn away. This invites us to a future full of hope.

SUMMARY: When we celebrate the Eucharist, we bring to God's table personal memories of our journey with God, the weave and warp of our life. We pray with good memories of grace as well as times of anxiety and fear when God seemed far from us. In all these memories, God asks us to forgive as he does.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: When trouble hits, we dial 911 for immediate help. This number sparks memories for all of us. We remember exactly where we were when the planes hit the towers on 9/11 or when we were sequestered at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Good memories are similar: standing together after a community applauds our wedding vows, watching a son or daughter make a key play in sports, or receiving a diploma after years of night school.

B) APPLICATION

1) The first reading from Sirach prepares us for Jesus' teaching in the Gospel about being forgiven and forgiving others as God forgives.

- a) The Sirach reading evokes "the last days" and encourages us to practice forgiving. We are called to live the commandments as the way we honor our covenant with God.
- b) We are members of a covenanted community. As God forgives others, we are to forgive.
- c) Today's message is to remember God's mercy on us. We then become that memory for others. By passing his mercy forward, we receive the same.
- d) Revenge and hate have no place in our relationship with God and others. Treating others with mercy gives us a peace grounded in divine grace.

2) In the Gospel, Peter questions Jesus on the exact number and types of sins that must be forgiven.

- a) Peter wants to know exactly which sins deserve mercy. Peter has not yet experienced his coming denial of Jesus. He wonders what practicing mercy requires.
- b) Jesus' response challenges Peter profoundly and clearly instead of listing sins, Jesus presents a story that gives a practical picture of mercy. He describes a pardoned debtor who fails to forgive

a much smaller debt owed by another servant.

- c) The ending of the parable creates a dilemma: The story's king throws the forgiven/unforgiving debtor into jail until his debt is paid. We wonder: How can this imprisoned man pay any debt?
- d) Jesus is emphasizing that if we do not forgive others their sins against us, God will do the same with us. Jesus loudly proclaims: We will receive what we have given.
- e) Our imagination can alter that last line. Jesus wants Peter to realize how selfishly sinful he can act—and so can we. Jesus is asking us to live with both our own and others' sinfulness as much as is possible. Not forgiving usually hurts the one who cannot forgive.

3. We keep wondering: How can we let go of the hurt that keeps us from forgiving others?

- a) It is difficult in families to forgive and forget. Some feel that because they have not forgotten the injury, they have not forgiven the hurter.
- b) What is important here remains the centrality of community, family, and relationships. The closer we get to others, the closer we get to our own deepest truths.
- c) While we cannot forgive and forget, the human hurts that are part of our story, God can bring us to that forgiveness. As we grow in God's image, our hearts are changed.
- d) Christ who abides within us enables us to want to forgive, which takes trust and patience. This Gospel story's ending reminds us that God does not ask the impossible from us.
- e) That last line of today's Gospel holds the most precious lesson: As Jesus teaches Peter, we need to remember all the times God has shown us mercy and forgiveness—and then do the same.
- f) If all this seems beyond us, can we simply take the first step: praying to want to forgive that one person whom we swore we could never forgive? It may take a while, but God is the one who can do impossible things.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

Today as we approach the table of the Lord, let us prepare to receive the one Bread that nourishes us all. May we put aside any lack of forgiveness that divides us.

(Jeanne Hunt)

Sunday Homily Helps

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 20, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #133

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

In verses leading up to this oracle, the prophet reminds the people about God's promise to David: His dynasty will be a lasting one. This announcement will be especially appreciated by a nation that has recently endured years of exile. The prophet then goes on to declare that this promise to David regarding his kingdom will benefit not only Israel but all people who turn to the Lord.

1) *Divine closeness.* In view of this marvelous revelation of God's gracious mercy, the prophet begins this passage by inviting the people to take full advantage of the things he has been saying. Through the words of a prophet, God is very accessible and near to a nation. God, of course, is never in hiding or far away. But the agency of a prophet makes people aware of God's presence all the more. And so any nation so fortunate as to have God this close should not lose the opportunity to respond with gratitude and renewed commitment to serving God.

2) *Divine ways.* Human ways and thoughts are limited and less than ideal, due to the weakness of pride and sin. Mortals find it difficult to forgive; they are preoccupied with thoughts of anger and retaliation. The vocabulary of this reading makes this point all the more striking by employing the term *scoundrel* in the first half of a line to match the word *wicked* in the second half. But the ways and thoughts of God far surpass those of mortals. Humans may plot revenge; God generously extends mercy and forgiveness. In the final verse, the prophet offers a compelling contrast that anyone could appreciate. God's ways are as far removed from human ways as the sky above is removed from the earth below. The lesson here is that there can really be no comparison between the two.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Philippians 1:20c-

24, 27a

1) *Service.* Paul feels an urgency to remain in this world for the sake of the those who have accepted the Gospel.

2) *Freedom.* At the same time, Paul longs to be free of this world so that he may be with the risen Lord.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

Several parables of Jesus are referred to as "hard" because their interpretation is difficult. They offer several possibilities of meaning, but none seems satisfactory. Today's Gospel, "The Workers in the Vineyard," is considered such a hard parable. These stories often deal with landowners and workers, wages and profits, and fair and unfair labor practices. Their real purpose, however, is to offer insights into what the kingdom of heaven is like.

1) *Hiring laborers.* A landowner hires day laborers for his vineyard. Ordinarily, a foreman would do this. For some reason, the landowner makes five hiring trips (dawn, nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock, and five o'clock). The first group hired agrees to "the usual daily wage," most likely a denarius, which would barely sustain a worker's family for one day. For the remaining four hires, the workers agree to "what is just" for the daily wage. So far, so good. The landowner appears very generous in hiring laborers, and there is nothing shady in how it was done.

2) *Paying laborers.* At the end of the workday, the foreman summons the laborers to pay them. The instructions for paying them are strange: This is done in reverse order of their hiring. Those last hired are paid first, enabling the first laborers hired to see what the later hires receive. Apparently, this is what the landowner wants—but why?

3) *The last will be first, and the first will be last.* When those who were hired first receive their pay, they obviously expect to get more than those hired last. That seems only fair and just. However, they received the same pay as those hired last. Workers hired first complain that this is unfair. The landowner rightly claims that he has not cheated them, for this is what they agreed to when hired. Then comes the key question: "Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money?" Some will say yes while others will say no. But this kind of equality characterizes the kingdom of heaven.

PURPOSE: Today's word speaks to us of God's closeness. Many people fear that God is distant and removed from our reality. Not so! God is much closer than we think.

SUMMARY: Isaiah tells us of God's intimacy with each one of us. St. Paul assures us of his dedication both to the people of his day and to us. The parable from the Gospel of Matthew is the difficult story of "The Workers in the Vineyard."

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: At the time of this writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is in full swing. There have been no public Masses for one month, with another month to go. The "stay at home" advice is still in effect. Liturgies that do take place can have no more than 10 people. That has made funerals, weddings, and Baptisms challenging. There have been painful closures of many businesses; people's livelihoods have been in jeopardy.

Where is God in all this mess? The feelings of loss have been incredible. Despair is in the air! COVID-19 has claimed many lives. Yet there are many people working to save lives. Healthcare workers have been very dedicated, risking their own lives to save the lives of others. These people have been the "workers in the vineyard" as we come to grips with this devastating virus. The faith of many has been shaken; the faith of many have been deepened. God is with us through thick and thin. God is with us through the hands of those who seek a cure, through those who strive to save lives. Even when there were no public liturgies, the power of sincere prayer remained strong.

B) APPLICATION

1) Today's parable is a difficult one because it is hard to interpret.

- a) How can we identify with any of the characters? Getting to work early or late, the incredible fairness of the landowner, the thankfulness and complaining of the workers. The possibilities of interpretation are endless.
- b) Often we identify with the lowliest character but are loath to admit it. If we are honest with ourselves, we can be open to change for the better.
- c) The power of the living word of God is ever-present. It takes a stout heart to admit it. This is the way the Gospels work.
- d) No matter what life throws at us, God is present. Divine grace gives us the courage to keep going.

2) Many people have lost loved ones in these days. Social distancing is challenging but effective.

- a) Daily life has a different flavor. Although we keep a safe distance from one another, we have become closer and more intimate.
- b) We long for the way things were before, yet nothing remains as it was. Life is about change; nothing is static.
- c) We pray for our beloved deceased. Through our grief, we somehow have become strong.
- d) All us have our comfort zones. No one likes to "move on" to new realities. These days have shaken us to the core. What we once took for granted, is gone—at least for now.

3) As a priest, I have greatly missed the assembly of people during daily and Sunday Masses. My daily life as I knew it was on hold.

- a) I am thankful for my religious community of friars. When some sort of normalcy returns, I will have a deeper appreciation for the "congregation."
- b) [*Homilist may want to cite ways that he or she was able to stay in touch with the congregation.*]
- c) What "life lessons" have we learned during these challenging days? How have I—how have we—become closer to God?
- d) In following the way of the Gospel, all of us are workers in the vineyard. Ours is a communal faith; we do not "go it alone." We have each other; God is present among us and through us.

4) How we deal with crisis defines our character.

- a) We tend to panic when we meet an unexpected problem. Eventually, we start processing the situation and come to a resolution—maybe with another's advice. The crisis is overcome.
- b) Our faith communities offer solace and comfort. We are after all, brothers and sisters in Christ. Praying together makes our private troubles public. Through our shared faith and communion, the intimacy of our loving and compassionate God is more evident and stronger.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

I write this outline in May. As we share cMmunion together in September, we bask in God's presence. I look at sharing and receiving Communion now as I have never done before.

(David Kobak, OFM)

Sunday Homily Helps

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 27, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #136

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Ezekiel 18:25–28

God appointed Ezekiel to look after the welfare of the people. In this text the prophet carries out this assignment by impressing upon them the truth that God offers them the invitation to repentance and life.

1) *Your ways*. This entire chapter unfolds as a lively exchange between God and the house of Israel, which is convinced that the guilt of a sinful generation reaches down into later generations. Thus children and grandchildren are thought to bear the burden of punishment for offenses committed by fathers and forefathers. In effect, later generations are judged by the misdeeds of those who lived before them. Ezekiel's contemporaries thus imagine the hardships they experience are due to the infidelity of their forefathers. As a consequence, they find no motivation to do anything to change their present circumstances. As far as they are concerned, a person is trapped by the past because nothing done in the present can alter things.

2) *My ways*. As God's spokesman, Ezekiel wants them to see how unfair it is for them to think this way. God holds each person responsible for his or her life. The present generation cannot escape responsibility by placing the blame on a previous generation. Likewise, the present generation cannot make the argument they deserve life simply on the basis of the good deeds of those who went before them. A virtuous person must remain virtuous and walk the path of life. To the sinful person, God always extends an invitation to turn away from the sins of the past and start afresh on the path of life. God's way is to invite each person to choose the path of life at the present moment. The door for repentance and life is always open.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Philippians 2:1–11

1) *Humbled*. Jesus became a mortal human being for our salvation. He walked the journey of life as we do—and in the end accepted death on the cross.

2) *Exalted*. God has exalted Jesus and declared him Lord of all. At his name every knee should bend and every tongue give him praise.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 21:28–32

The parable of the two sons focuses on the poor quality of religious leaders. There are at least three interpretations of this story. Matthew's strong theme of hearing the words of Jesus and putting them into practice can be detected in this story.

1) *The two sons*. The first son is told to work in the vineyard. He refuses but later does work there. The second son received the order; he says yes but does not go. Jesus then asks, "Which of these sons did the father's will?" The chief priests and elders say the first son did the father's will. This explanation flows from a culture of honor and shame in which, given a choice between being publicly honored and privately shamed or be publicly shamed and privately honored, the honorable choice is to publicly save face.

2) *Jesus' response*. Jesus agrees that the first son did the father's will. He accuses the Jewish leaders of failing to believe in the way of righteousness proclaimed by John the Baptist. Anyone who hears the word of God must act on it. Saying yes must be accompanied by corresponding action. Leaders must exemplify what they teach.

3) *Tax collectors and prostitutes*. Jesus boldly asserts that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before the religious leaders. When these outsiders and misfits heard the word of John the Baptist, they believed him. Seeing this, the religious leaders had a chance to change their minds and believe, but they refused. Jesus' point here is a theme that Matthew weaves throughout his entire Gospel: Saying the right words is never enough. One has to take those words and put them into practice. It might take some time to fully understand those words and allow them to have their transformative result. Such transformation can lead a person from refusal to believe to accepting and acting on those words—as was the case with the first son. This is a very stern warning from Jesus to his own religious leaders.

PURPOSE: To encourage listeners to move toward a more adult faith that does justice to their age and life experience.

SUMMARY: People become adult Christians not simply by reaching a certain age but, more importantly, by accepting the responsibilities flowing from their Baptism as disciples of Jesus and by integrating into their faith life's highs and lows.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: For almost 90 years, Alcoholics Anonymous groups and many similar groups have used Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

B) APPLICATION: We can change some things but not others. Honesty and courage help us to know which is which—and not to shrink from whatever we can change. Today's first reading and Gospel emphasize personal integrity, the regular decision to explain one's life by the choices we have made and not by the choices that other people have made for us.

Many of us could easily fill in the blanks of this sentence: "If only **someone else** [fill in one or more names] had done _____, then my life would have turned out much better." We are, however, not nearly as likely to say, "If only I had done _____, then my life would have turned out better." Which person would you prefer to have as a friend, business partner, or spouse?

1) Through the prophet Ezekiel, God confronted any Israelites who were tempted to be spectators at their own life rather than active participants in it.

- a) It's easy to identify one's parents or other relatives as the total explanation for one's life.
- b) They certainly play a key role, but there comes a time when no adult is simply the sum of his or her parents' decisions.
- c) Ezekiel's audience was tempted to think that repentance on their part was useless because their lives had already been determined by other people's choices.
- d) Ezekiel brings his audience a liberating word by challenging that idea, by encouraging them to admit how much freedom they already have.
- e) By working with others, they may be able to increase their freedom. A group might be able to

change whatever one person cannot change.

2) Freedom is a key part of the image of God in which each of us has been created.

- a) God did not have to create anything! Everything that God did create was created in freedom.
- b) A key difference between children and adults is that adults tend to have a better sense of their freedom and the consequences of their various choices.
- c) A 60-year-old child is constantly surprised at the consequences of his or her choices.
- d) Some people have argued that God made a huge mistake in making people free. God apparently thinks differently.
- e) The best things in life (for example, love, sacrifice, promoting the common good, or some interest larger than one's own) all require freedom.
- f) Yes, we make mistakes, but we are also free to repent.

3) The second son in today's Gospel originally made a selfish choice by refusing to work in the vineyard owned by his father, but that same son recognized his freedom to repent and then exercised it.

- a) The first son failed to follow through on his promise, thus trading away some of his integrity for momentary convenience.
- b) At different times, we have probably acted as each of these sons did.
- c) The crucial questions raised by today's Gospel parable are: Which decisions are most typical of us? How ready are we to change a decision that we later admit undermines our integrity as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- d) Every virtue has an element of swimming against the current, of challenging "what everybody knows," which is also a great cover for our choices. "Don't ask me; ask them," we can always say.
- e) John the Baptist, Jesus, Mary his mother, and Mary Magdalene were all people of integrity, ready to use their freedom well even in the face of opposition from others.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

Each Eucharist leads us toward greater integrity if we cooperate with its graces—and where they lead us.

(Pat McCloskey, OFM)

Sunday Homily Helps Lectern Guide

INTRODUCTIONS TO PENITENTIAL RITE AND READINGS, MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE is a model which can also be adapted for use as an introduction to the liturgy itself. The INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS, if read by priest or lector before the respective readings, are intended to focus the attention of the listeners. The MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS relate to the theme of the homily outline and may be used to supplement the usual petitions.

October 4, 2020 — 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Our God refuses to give up on us but keeps offering us grace. For the times we have excluded ourselves, taken too much credit for what we have accomplished, or simply have not noticed that God is trying to heal us, we ask forgiveness.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet challenges the people to bear good fruit by the things they say and do.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, we learn that the way to peace begins with prayers of gratitude to God.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, salvation history is described in terms of an allegory involving a landowner, his vineyard, and his violent, incompetent tenants.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That Pope Francis and all Church leaders patiently and faithfully tend the vineyard that is the Church so that the People of God may bear their fruit,
- 2) That civil leaders govern with the humble awareness that everyone in their charge comes from God,
- 3) That we live in grateful awareness of the signs of God's care, trusting in his presence and never imagining his absence,
- 4) That those who have died inherit the kingdom that God has promised and that those who grieve remember the generosity of their deceased loved ones,

October 11, 2020 — 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Jesus proclaimed an invitation to the bad and the good in today's Gospel parable, inviting us to understand that God does not love us because we are good. We are good because God loves us.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet describes the joy and abundance that always overflows

from a right relationship with God.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul knows that in the Lord he can find the strength to face any circumstance.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus teaches that salvation is never automatic, just as a late invited wedding guest must still have a proper wedding garment.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For the Church throughout the world as it seeks to comfort and heal all who are sick or are grieving the loss of loved ones,
- 2) That the final weeks before our national elections be a time when truth will prevail and the spirit of wisdom will guide us,
- 3) That all who are seeking work find the jobs needed to support their families in dignity,
- 4) That all who have died know the fullness of life with God, and that all who mourn them be comforted by their faith and by people of faith all around them,

October 18, 2020 — 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: We gather again to nourish our souls, to reflect on when and where our words and actions have expressed God's plan and when they did not. Hear us now, Triune God, as we pray.

- **INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet finds God's providential love and care in the circumstances that surround the prophet.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul gives thanks for the profound faith exhibited in the lives of believers.
- **INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus avoids the Pharisees' attempt to entrap him. He teaches that what belongs to Caesar goes to Caesar, but what belongs to God goes to God.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That Pope Francis and all Church and world leaders be open to the Holy Spirit,
- 2) For proper care and respect for Mother Earth,
- 3) For the lost and forsaken, the disenfranchised, and all those in need,
- 4) For eyes open to seeing injustice and hearts open to working for change,

October 25, 2020 — 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Lord, we come to you once more to set our hearts on loving you, that we may be restored and live lives that reflect your glory. Free us now from the things that tarnish your likeness in us.

- INTRODUCTION: In the first reading, God's holy people are reminded to be kind to others just as God has been kind to them.
- INTRODUCTION: In the second reading, Paul is encouraged by the fine example of faith exhibited in the lives of believers.
- INTRODUCTION: In the Gospel, Jesus combines two commandments into one, declaring that together they form the basis for the whole law of Moses and the prophets.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That Pope Francis proclaim the Gospel message of mercy throughout the world, encouraging us to have faith in the healing power of God,
- 2) That all Christians around the world find "new ways" to mend what is broken by war, greed, hatred, and bigotry,
- 3) That all those who feel ashamed know God's abiding love for them and have the grace to accept his healing presence,
- 4) That we may see in others what God sees in us,

Sunday Homily Helps

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 4, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #139

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Up to this point in the book, Isaiah's oracles have concentrated on challenging king and people to abandon pride and self-interest. In place of pursuing their own interests, king and people should be engaged in service to God and the sincere practice of religion. To cap off his message thus far, Isaiah presents everyone with the lyrics of a song that neatly illustrate how disappointing God finds the current state of affairs.

1) *Toil*. The song's initial verses reveal all the effort a certain friend puts into his vineyard. This friend finds just the right location and a fertile hillside that provides drainage for the vines. Then the friend prepares the ground for planting by removing any stones that might get in the way. At last, this friend plants the very best vines on the hillside. The friend is so confident the vines will produce good grapes that he takes care to protect them from any harm and even hews out a wine press to crush the fine grapes the vines will yield.

2) *Outcome*. The outcome is very disappointing. In spite of all the work the friend put into the vineyard, the crop failed. The vintner gave the plants every advantage to produce fine wine. The problem must be deep within the grapes. With the song finished, Isaiah reveals its true meaning. The vineyard represents God's people. God gives them every advantage to produce the good fruit that represents right judgment and justice. But instead, their prideful ways lead to oppression, bloodshed, and cries for help. To change for the better, the nation will have to experience deprivation and ruin. Only such harsh measures will make them wiser in the things that really matter.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Philippians 4:6-9

1) *Pray*. The way that leads to peace and tranquility begins with prayers and grateful expressions to God.

2) *Serve*. The way of peace also demands commitment to the ideals of the Gospel. Among them are truth, honor, justice, purity, and love.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 21:33-43

The parable of the wicked tenants is an allegorical version of salvation history. The vineyard represents

Israel. The tenants are Israel's leaders. The householder is God. The servants are Israel's prophets, and the son is Jesus. Matthew has slightly reworked a version of this story found in Mark 12:1-12. Most commentators see the hand of the early Church very much at work in this parable, and so they do not attribute it to Jesus himself.

1) *The setting*. The setting for this parable focuses on a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower and then leased the whole thing out to tenants. This would be a good time to open your Bibles to Isaiah 5:1-7. There you will find the background story that the evangelist is using for his story of the wicked tenants. He presumes you know the imagery in Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard."

2) *The violence at vintage time*. When vintage time arrives, the landowner sends servants to collect his produce. These servants are met by tenants who violently refuse to pay up. The servants are beat up and even killed. This same dynamic happens a second time. Finally, the landowner sends his son, thinking for some reason he will not be harmed. He is tragically mistaken. The tenants kill the son. Then comes the key question: What will happen to the violent tenants when the landowner returns and discovers what has happened? The tenants will be killed and replaced by other tenants.

3) *The real story*. A hasty interpretation has this story being about the taking of the kingdom of God away from the Jews and giving it to the gentiles. The Jews rejected Jesus and thus lost the kingdom. That interpretation is shortsighted and easily leads to antisemitism and supersessionism. The conflict here is about incompetent Jewish leaders who fail to carry out faithfulness to God's plan. The Hebrew prophets warned them repeatedly—but to no avail. Those leaders are going to be replaced by new, competent, faithful Jewish leaders. Ultimately, these new Jewish leaders will become the Church. This story is not about how God favored the Christians and rejected the Jews.

PURPOSE: To show us that the context of our lives provides all we need to bear fruit. It is right for God to expect a harvest.

SUMMARY: God cares for us by confronting and pursuing us until we bear fruit. He won't give up. Even if we exclude ourselves, he keeps holding up a mirror so we can see ourselves as he sees us. This is the good news, hope and joy in today's parables (first reading and the Gospel).

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: Have you seen the classic optical illusion drawing that causes some people to see a vase where others clearly see two women facing each other? Or consider the Magic Eye illustrations in which a 3D image pops out for some people whereas others see only an abstract pattern. That is how the Pharisees—and we—"hear" these parables today.

B) APPLICATION: Today's parables are similar. God is the householder in both. However, in Isaiah the problem is with the vines and the fruit. In Matthew, the produce is fine, but the delivery system is malfunctioning. The problem is with the tenants.

1) Each listener hears the story from her or his own perspective.

- a) What "pops out" depends on our viewpoint and ability to look at ourselves honestly.
- b) Jesus was critiquing the Pharisees for their collusion with the Roman Empire and the temple leaders in Jerusalem for not properly caring for their people.
- c) What is Jesus saying to us (as individuals, as a parish community, as the Church, as Americans) about how our garden is growing?
- d) These parables pull us toward an unknown future about which we know only that Jesus is the cornerstone. It is futile to debate old structures because a new one is coming.

2) Jesus relentlessly pursues us to avoid excluding ourselves from the kingdom of God.

- a) This is not Jesus' first run-in with the Pharisees; he keeps confronting them by eating with the wrong people, not answering their questions but escaping their traps. Then he identifies a list of woes against them.
- b) Is he trying to condemn or exclude them?

Simply picking a fight? Why won't he just let it go?

- c) He keeps on coming because he is unwilling to give up on us. He knows we can still bear fruit.
- d) We often respond by running, avoiding, becoming defensive, and thinking he is certainly talking about other people—not us.

3) We are all given vineyards consisting of the people, events, and circumstances of our lives that God has entrusted to our care.

- a) Whether these are painful, joyful, or ambiguous it is possible to bring forth fruit from them. The fruits of our work in our own context will show us to be sharers in God's kingdom—or not.
- b) We exclude ourselves from that kingdom by hanging on to old guilt, cynicism, believing that we are not good enough (perfectionism), or living on autopilot rather than with thanksgiving and celebration.
- c) To the degree we are not producing, we are side-stepping our own lives. That is an issue about which Jesus will continue to challenge us.
- d) Prayer and service, as commended to us in our reading from Philippians, will help us to recognize ourselves in the mirror that Jesus holds up before us.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

As we come to the table of the Lord, our cornerstone, let us offer ourselves as the fruit of the vine and work of human hands. We do this as a grateful return for the grace God so freely offers us each time we receive Christ's Body and Blood.

(Pam Krinock)

Sunday Homily Helps

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 11, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #142

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a

In Isaiah's oracles some mountains represent human pride; their height obscures the view of God's mountain. God's mountain, on the other hand, should rise above all others. When that happens, many blessings follow. This reading explores several of them.

1) *Abundance*. Human agendas often lead to hardship and deprivation. But God's plan is to nourish people to life. Isaiah here speaks about the fine food and select wines that are available at God's banquet. There is no limit to God's resources to sustain life. If only people recognize the abundance that flows from placing God's ways above all others. But sadly the veil of human pride envelopes the nations of the world. Like a spider's web, pride looms above, threatening the lives of many people. But when God's mountain prevails, that web is removed and nations no longer need fear the consequences of war and violence.

2) *Joy*. In one of the most moving lines of this book, Isaiah portrays God's hand as wiping away the tears that run down every face as people mourn the losses that come with violence and warfare. Isaiah is quite familiar with the pain and loss that resulted from the misguided policies of faithless monarchs such as Ahaz and Hezekiah (chapters 7 and 38). They decline Isaiah's offer of the life-giving alternative of choosing God's way. Yet one day God will remove the reproach of such kings who value their own advancement over the needs of others. On the day God accomplishes all of this, the nation will turn to God in thanksgiving for the gift of salvation. Joy will replace the tears of the past.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

1) *Strong*. In his service to the Lord, Paul finds the strength to cope with every situation, whether it brings hardship or abundance.

2) *Thankful*. Paul is thankful for all the kindness shown him by the community of faith. He wishes that God bless them in every way.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14 (142)

This judgment parable has been allegorized into a version of salvation history. When this Gospel was written, the final messianic banquet was seen as a grand wedding feast. Israel's original call as God's covenanted people was not accepted by all. So also, after Jesus not everyone accepted the Gospel message. This dynamic of God's invitation and the people's rejection is prevalent throughout the entire Bible. See, for example, Proverbs chapter 9.

1) *The invitations*. A king sends his servants to invite guests to his son's wedding feast. Refusing such an invitation would be shameful, but that is exactly what happens. This king later sends his servants to invite other people to the feast that is ready to begin. This time the response is even worse: The king's servants are physically mistreated; some are killed. The outraged king totally destroys those responsible. Finally, the king sends his servants out to invite any and all kinds of people to this wedding feast. This fills the hall with marginalized guests ready to enjoy the feast.

2) *No wedding garment*. As this wedding feast begins, the king makes a big commotion over a guest who is not wearing the proper wedding garment. The king severely reprimands this man without a wedding garment and throws him out of the banquet. This strange action by the king is hard to explain. Why would one invite both good and bad people to a wedding feast and then throw a person out for lack of the proper clothing? At first, this simply does not make any sense.

3) *Many are invited, but few are chosen*. Keep in mind this is not really a wedding feast but a description of salvation history. This is the messianic banquet; regardless of what one may expect, one must be prepared to enter this new reality. It is not enough simply to show up. This has been true for both Judaism and Christianity from the beginning. Salvation is not automatic. It requires a life of good deeds: a wedding garment.

PURPOSE: To help us see the care, compassion, and love of God, even in dire circumstances.

SUMMARY: Jesus addressed a parable to those who thought of God as judgmental in order to open their eyes and the eyes of his followers after his passion, death, and resurrection. Their new understanding of God must also govern our lives.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: U.S. couples have recently begun to pay for their own weddings. For years the bride's parents were expected to foot the bill for the wedding and the reception. In the time of Jesus, it was the father of the groom who threw the party. But no matter who is paying, weddings—at least before the pandemic—were often very big and expensive.

In today's Gospel, the groom's father, a king, pays the bill and is very concerned about who comes and who doesn't, for it is a matter of pride and money—and he is, after all, a king! But we must remember that not every king in every parable Jesus told in the Gospels represents God—or at least not every king in every parable is acting in the way that Jesus teaches us to expect God to act. If this king is not acting as Jesus has taught us to expect God to act, how is this king acting?

B) APPLICATION: In listening to any passage from Matthew's Gospel, we must always remember his audience: early Christians who had been Jewish but have found in Jesus and the community that grew up around his memory a powerful revelation of God's love for all people. The king is not acting like God, but like a human king, careful with his limited resources, jealous of his image, and all too willing to prove to everyone that he is a boss who must be obeyed.

1) Jesus and his community were trying to live out a new way of understanding God.

- a) Jesus addressed this parable to important officials and elders because he knew that they thought as this human king did.
- b) Because they thought that God was about power and rules, when someone broke a rule (not showing up or being dressed properly), they should be punished. After all, early Jewish Christians got thrown out of synagogues!
- c) But the community addressed by Matthew would have remembered well that Jesus spoke of inviting the "bad and good alike."
- d) Suddenly, they realized that the reign of God that

Jesus described, that his followers tried to live, is for everyone.

2) Jesus has changed everything, or maybe Jesus has pointed out that God has always had a different way of thinking and acting than human rulers with human pride and greed.

- a) The prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus, already described compassionate God who wipes away the tears from every face.
- b) That image of God gives us a glimpse of how caring, how gentle, and how concerned God is with each of us.
- c) God is about loving and living in abundance, providing food and wine—juicy, rich food, and choice wines.
- d) God will destroy the veils, the divisions between peoples that keep them apart, and God will destroy even death.

3) How do we act on that understanding of a compassionate, caring God, that Jesus and his followers took over from the best of the Jewish tradition?

- a) Paul wrote to the Philippians that he has learned to live in humble circumstances. Aren't the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic challenging us to live humbly, reflecting deeply on the meaning of life and of our actions?
- b) When we are fearful, we must remember that God is always our shepherd, even in the valley of death's shadow. God is with us in the worst of times as well as at our best feasts and parties.
- c) God is the giver of all good gifts, from the gift of life itself, to wisdom, curiosity, and the ability to change when that is needed. When we change well, we are thanking God for those good gifts that allow us to change and grow.
- d) We show our understanding of God's compassion, care, and love for us when we are compassionate, caring, and loving of others around us, especially the most vulnerable people and those most in need.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

Within the last nine months, we have experienced an imposed eucharistic fast. Now we give thanks for all of the times that we have been and are able to share in God's rich food and choice wine, putting on a wedding garment of gratitude.

(Jack Clark Robinson, OFM)

Sunday Homily Helps

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 18, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #145

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Some of Isaiah's oracles contrast God's power with human fabrications. Mortals may be creative in fashioning their own world, but God alone provides all the materials they employ to do such things. In this oracle, the prophet demonstrates that events in time can be understood as contributing to the faith journey of God's faithful people.

1) *A king.* The exiles may have imagined the Babylonian Empire would endure for countless generations. But soon Cyrus came to ascendancy and founded the Persian Empire that would prove more lasting than its predecessors. Cyrus may think all this was accomplished by his efforts and those of his divinities. Isaiah says the God of Israel has held Cyrus by the right hand and prepared for an end to the exile. Everything took place in God's providence although Cyrus did not recognize this, but Isaiah does. The oracle speaks of gates unlocked and doors opened wide to welcome Cyrus, reflecting the fact that Babylon's great gates were opened to accept the army of Cyrus without resistance.

2) *A servant.* Thus the way was prepared for the people of Israel to return to their homeland. The victories of Cyrus ultimately proved beneficial for God's servant Israel. These events demonstrated that the pride of kings leads only to hardship and loss. Now human pride is revealed as fruitless; its place has been taken by a people committed to serving God. Their experience will enlighten other nations from east to west in the ways of God, who alone works such wonders.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

1) *Faithful.* Paul is very grateful for the commitment to faith, hope, and love exhibited in the lives of the faithful.

2) *Chosen.* Paul is also grateful for their acceptance of the Gospel and their determination to put their faith into action.

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 22:15-21

This passage begins a series of controversies between Jesus and Pharisees who seek to "entrap" him through lose/lose questions. Should one pay the one denarius poll tax to the Roman government? The Pharisees opposed it, but the supporters of Herod Antipas accepted it. This story focuses on how Jesus escapes his opponents' deadly trap. It is not a political statement about paying taxes or promoting a separation between Church and state.

1) *The motive.* The Pharisees with some Herodians try to trap Jesus in a word battle to publicly embarrass him. They refer to Jesus as "Teacher" and then continue to build him up as a paragon of truth, virtue, and justice—all without sincerity. The Pharisees are building Jesus up for the sole purpose of tearing him down. Keep in mind that Jesus is a Jew; much of this is an intra-Jewish conflict.

2) *The question.* The Pharisees choose a highly controversial issue among Jews. Should they pay the Roman poll tax? If Jesus says yes, then they will claim he is not a faithful Jew. If he says no, then he is advocating breaking the laws of the Roman empire. Either answer will put him in bad stead.

3) *Jesus' answer.* Jesus immediately senses the malice of his opponents. Because he knows this is a test, he refers to his opponents as hypocrites. He asks the Pharisees for a Roman coin. A faithful Jew would not carry such a coin, but his opponents have one. He refers to the image on the coin that in Latin said, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, great high priest." The opponents can easily identify the image. Technically, that Roman coin was the property of the emperor. Jesus very cleverly tells his opponents "to repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Only the official coin belongs to Caesar. However, Jewish creation theology taught that everything belonged to God. Jesus denies Caesar any claim to divinity. That is reserved to God alone. But Caesar can have back his one coin, for it already belongs to him.

PURPOSE: To create an awareness that God is the giver of all our gifts. Our achievements and successes are a result of his goodness.

SUMMARY: Today's readings illustrate that, whether we are aware or not, the praise for what we may have done belongs not to us but instead, in all honesty, to God.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: I'd like you to think for a moment about a special talent or gift you have or have received. What makes it special? Who gave it to you? PAUSE.

[Homilist may need to give a couple examples for people not used to having to answer some question as part of a homily.]

How many of you thought of God as the giver of your gift? *[OK, I won't ask you to raise your hands!]* Perhaps not many. Why? Because we don't tend to think about how many people or groups were involved in making or developing the talent or gift that you identified.

B) APPLICATION: If we think back far enough, we will inevitably discover that everything we have has come from the giver of all gifts. All that reflection gets us to today's readings.

1) The gift of a mellow heart (first reading).

- a) Each of us has received gifts that we tend to overlook or for which we take full credit. Seldom do we realize they're God-given.
- b) Cyrus, king of Persia in the sixth century BC, is a case in point.
- c) Although he worshipped several gods, the God of Israel gifted him with a very understanding heart.
- d) After the Jewish exiles had been held captive in Babylon for almost 50 years, Cyrus released them and allowed them to return to Israel with all their belongings.
- e) There they were gifted with the freedom to practice their own religion, eventually building the Second Temple. Solomon's much more magnificent temple one was the first one.

2) The gift of gratitude (second reading).

- a) Paul had told the Thessalonians about Jesus on a previous visit before returning with Silas and Timothy.

- b) In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul begins, "We give thanks to God always for you."
- c) He goes on to thank them for the faith, hope, and love that they exhibit. This feeling of gratitude permeates this letter.
- d) Meister Eckhart (German theologian who died around 1327) wrote: "If the only prayer you ever say is *Thank you*, you will have said enough."
- e) Gratitude—what a gift! And it costs the one who gives it so little!

3) The gift of all gifts (today's Gospel).

- a) Not all gifts are accepted because they may not be what the person receiving them truly wanted or expected.
- b) This was true of the Pharisees, many of whom were expecting a royal Messiah, especially one who could drive out the Romans who had ruled them for almost 100 years.
- c) Threatened by Jesus, many Pharisees connived against him with the Sadducees, who were the Jewish group most indebted to Rome.
- d) When Jesus saw through the Pharisees' scheme, his answer amazed them. They left Jesus in order to plan another plot.
- e) Those who accepted him received the gift of everlasting life. What better gift than this?

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

Jesus has given his apostles and his disciples down through the centuries the great gift of the Eucharist, which helps them to fulfill the great trust he has placed in them. It also assists them in converting to his ways, to his values.

(Judy Schueneman)

Sunday Homily Helps

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 25, 2020

Cycle A Readings

Lectionary #148

Exegesis of the 1st Reading: Exodus 22:20–26

The tribes of Israel have now arrived at Mount Sinai. There they accept the challenge to serve God, who alone has delivered them from oppression and kept them from all harm. This covenant with God demands that they reflect in their own lives the benevolence God displays toward them.

1) *Mercy*. God reminds the tribes that they were once regarded as aliens in the land of Egypt. Now they enjoy the great privilege of being God's chosen people. This wonderful privilege ought to motivate them to display kindness and mercy toward others. This will be exhibited most dramatically in the way they treat the most vulnerable members of society. Widows and orphans had no family to care for them. Their covenant brothers and sisters must step forward to take the place of family. And if such hapless members of society are wronged in any way, the perpetrators must answer to God, before whom they swore to respect the terms of the covenant.

2) *Generosity*. The tribes of Israel experienced during the Exodus the boundless generosity of God. This kind of generosity is now expected of them in their dealings with others. They must use their resource for the benefit of others without seeking their own advantage. This world's tangibles should be recognized as God's gifts from God that are not to be withheld from those in need. Those failing to display such generosity will answer to God, who protects the meek and the lowly.

Exegesis of the 2nd Reading: 1 Thessalonians

1:5C–10

1) *Belief*. Paul gives thanks that the faithful have so ardently received the word of truth that they have set an example for all believers.

2) *Truth*. Paul commends them for setting aside their former idolatry and embracing the word of truth

Exegesis of the Gospel: Matthew 22:34–40

Matthew's version of "the Greatest Commandment" is similar to that found in Mark 12:28–34. Matthew sharpens the focus to make it a controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. Once again, because Matthew's

audience is Jewish and Jesus is Jewish, this is an intra-Jewish dispute. Judaism believed that, in addition to the Torah, Moses also received from God 613 oral laws: 248 positive ones while 365 were negative. Rabbis frequently debated about which of these 613 commandments was the most important. In today's Gospel, a "scholar of the law" (a scribe) tests Jesus regarding which law is the greatest.

1) *Which commandment of the law is the greatest?* Jesus answers by first quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. Almost every Jew would know this verse by heart. Many rabbis would agree with Jesus that the totality of love stipulated by this version lies at the very center of the law. Judaism saw the Torah (law) as a unified whole, including heart, soul, and mind. It also required putting this love into concrete practice. This reflects what Judaism means by covenant fidelity, which includes willing and doing.

2) *The second is like it*. Jesus was not asked for a second-place commandment. Nevertheless, he quotes Leviticus 19:18, which declares that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus then makes it very clear that this additional commandment is not a second choice but is equal to the first. Again, no Jew would argue with Jesus against the importance of loving one's neighbor as oneself. If Jesus manifests any originality here, it might be in his combining Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18, seeing them as one—and the greatest commandment.

3) *The law and the prophets*. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus makes it clear that he has come not to do away with the law and the prophets but rather to fulfill them. Obviously, some people felt that Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets; their observance is now surpassed by his teaching. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, the law and the prophets are even more important now. Their importance stems from the fact that they flow from the greatest commandment as Jesus has just articulated it. This is solid orthodoxy—both for Judaism and for the members of Matthew's Jewish Christian community.

PURPOSE: To worship God and to be a member of his people means to possess a heart motivated by love and shared generously in acts of charity.

SUMMARY: By faith we know that God is a holy Trinity of love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit experience an endless spiral of love out of which God creates. Truly being in God's image and likeness means reflecting the love that is our patronage.

A) ATTENTION-GETTER: [*Homilist may want to personalize this story.*] As a child my family often spent Thanksgiving at my grandparents' house. Of course, when you are a child and visiting family, everyone comments on how much you have grown up, saying how you look "so much like your father" or "You have your mother's eyes." I was often told I looked like my namesake, my great grandfather whom I never knew. Years later as an adult, I finally saw a picture of him, and sure enough the resemblance is quite striking. Most of us have some features that show our lineage. We wear our family histories on our faces.

B) APPLICATION: We share many traits with our blood relatives and our spiritual Father. We have been created in God's image and likeness. The more we live in divine love, the more we reflect that love in the world, sharing a glimpse of our heavenly Father.

1) The Greatest Commandment (Part 1).

- a) Asked to name the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5: "You shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."
- b) God is the greatest of all that has been and ever will be. Thus, we love God most of all.
- c) This commandment is the wellspring from which all else flows. We love God first, which then allows us to love what he loves and as he loves, shaping our identity completely.
- d) Loving God in this way links us to the source of our own creation and reveals our deepest identity: God's children. The more we love God, the more we look like our heavenly Father.

2) The Greatest Commandment (Part 2).

- a) In a sense, Jesus cheats by combining two commandments into one. He says, "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- b) This commandment flows from the one to love

God first. Loving God genuinely requires loving our neighbor. These two commandments are, in fact, one—inseparably tied to one another. You cannot have one without the other.

- c) This bond between the love of God and neighbor tells us that God is love itself. He creates, sustains, restores, and redeems everything; he is a loving God.
- d) We truly look like our Father when we must love others as God loves us.

3) This summarizes the whole of the law of Moses.

- a) Jesus points out that this law and the traditions of the elders are meant to reflect one simple and absolute reality: We are children of a loving God and must live in accordance with his divine love.
- b) In the reading from Exodus, God commands his people to care for widows and orphans.
- c) "I will surely hear their cry." Our Father is moved with compassion—and we should be also.
- d) We do not follow the law of Moses and the prophets to carry favor with God, who loves us regardless of our station in life. We can do nothing to change that!
- e) By following the law as a means of loving God and neighbor, we are living into the image of our heavenly Father.
- f) When others see how the people of Israel treat the least among them, they will be seeing a reflection of their parentage. God will be glorified in the world through his progeny.

4) Living as children of God.

- a) When we do as Jesus commands, we live into our inheritance as children of God.
- b) God is glorified in his children. His children are glorified in him, and any outcasts are restored to their dignity as members of this divine family of love.

C) TRANSITION TO LITURGY OF EUCHARIST:

Through Jesus' act of selfless love, God's will for us has been revealed. By sharing in his Body and Blood, we are made adopted children of God. The love that invites us into his embrace also sends us out to restore what is broken, find what is lost, and bring light to those in darkness. As God's children, we are to live so lovingly that the world may see in us the face of our heavenly Father.

(Clifford Hennings, OFM)