

### **3<sup>RD</sup> WEEK OF LENT**

**MONDAY** - Luke 4:24-30

The Rejection at Nazareth

I read the following summary of the comments made about the parish priest in a typical parish entitled “*A Priest Is Always Wrong.*” It runs this way:

*If he starts the Mass on time, people say his watch is wrong*

*But if he waits for people, they say he has never been punctual*

*If he preaches too long, they say they get bored*

*But if his homily is too short, they say he is unprepared*

*If he asks for donation, they say he is greedy*

*But if he does not ask, they say he is proud and lazy*

*If he visits houses, they say he is always out*

*But if he stays in the convent, they say that he has no time for them*

*If he is too young, they say he has no experience*

*But if he is too old, they say he should retire*

*But when a priest dies, nobody can take his place.*

Today’s gospel Jesus is back in Nazareth and He is speaking in the synagogue. And the people assume that since He is their *kababayan* (town mate) He is obliged to perform miracles for them. Before anyone or anywhere else, their sick people should be healed first. But Jesus shows them that He has to perform miracles, not only to them but also to all; that God cares for all of His people and that, when it comes to help He has no favorites. He cites the examples of two famous prophets: Elijah, who worked a miracle to feed a widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17:9) in the pagan territory of

Sidon when there was a famine throughout Israel; and Elisha who cleansed Naaman the Syrian (2Kings 7:1, 3) of his leprosy though he was a foreigner and therefore an enemy. And this angers His listeners who consider themselves to have a monopoly on God. They are God's chosen people and they resent the fact that Jesus was putting them all on the same level.

I can imagine how frustrating it might be for Jesus who labors so much to preach the good news of salvation only to be refused by the very people who are expected to support Him of His mission. Worse still, because of their anger, they drive Him out of town with the intention of hurling Him down the cliff.

If God has no favorites, then He has no favorites within us. In other words, if we spread out the canvas of our life: the good, the bad and the ugly before Him, He would have total acceptance for each area. Fr. Jack McArdle in his homily on this gospel passage said that we don't try to put on a pious and holy face when we come before God! He knows us through and through and all He asks is that we stand honestly and humbly before Him. Humility has had a bad press because it can be interpreted as meaning that we are worthless, useless and nothing better than a worm crawling around. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are good, because in the words of Herb Banks, God don't make no junk. Humility is nothing more than accepting things exactly as they are. Humility is truth and the truth will always set us free.

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**TUESDAY** -Matt 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

The famed psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger (*Today in the Word*, March 1989, p. 8) once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!

One of the most beautiful words in any language is the word "forgive." The word is a common one but the essence of the word is in the last part, "give". To forGIVE means to give someone a release from the wrong that he has done to you. It means to give up any right of retaliation.

Accordingly, there are five kinds of forgiveness in the Bible. First is Judicial Forgiveness. This is the eternal forgiveness of all sins of the one who has trusted Christ, (Acts 26:18; Eph. 1:7). Second is Paternal Forgiveness. This is restoration of fellowship with God after we committed sin. The conditions are twofold: a) Confession (1John 1:9; John 13:4-10); (b) Forgiveness of others. Third is Personal Forgiveness. This is the restoration of our fellowship with others. This is so important because Jesus teaches us that we are forgiven if we are willing to forgive others, (Matt. 6:14-15). Fourth is Social forgiveness. This is restoration of our fellowship with society, (John 8:1-10). This may be a personal attitude or getting ourselves involved in programs and ministries of our parish. Fifth is Ecclesiastical Forgiveness. This is restoration of fellowship with the church (2Cor. 2:5-11). This forgiveness assumes a prior discipline by the church. The purpose of discipline is restoration; and forgiveness assumes repentance and restoration.

And for the Jews forgiving others is not only a duty to fulfil but also a part of their religious life as well. Like for example in the book of Sirach, it says: "Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven," (28:2). But there are limitations or they numbered their forgiveness that they ought to give to other people. An example of this is in the book of Job: "Forgive man twice, three times," (33:29). Most of the Jewish leaders during that time proposed that it was more than enough to forgive four times.

That is why in today's gospel, St. Peter, thinking that he exceeds the teaching of the rabbis, makes a proposal of forgiving others seven times, a perfect number for the Jews; it means completeness as in seven days for the creation of the world. He thinks that he is generous enough and deserves appreciation from Jesus. But Jesus answers him: "Not seven times but seventy seven times." In other words, Jesus is asking His disciples to forgive others without limitation and at all times. Forgiveness is a matter of love and not of how many times.

Yes forgiveness is very hard to do especially if we are hurt due to past troubles, rejection and humiliation, suspicion and distrust. Forgiveness hurts especially when it is extended to somebody who doesn't deserve it; has not earned it; and may misuse it. Forgiveness also costs especially when it means accepting instead of demanding

repayment for the wrong done; releasing the other instead of exacting revenge; reaching out in love instead of relinquishing resentments.

But forgiveness is our deepest need and at the same time, our highest achievement. Let us set the other person free through confession of our sins and prayer. This is true forgiveness. Let us contribute to the healing forgiveness that we and the world so greatly long for.

It is far better to forgive and forget than to resent and remember, (*Our Daily Bread*, Thursday, December 20).

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**WEDNESDAY** - Matt 5:17-19

Teaching about the Law

Jesus in today's gospel says that: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfil," (v. 17).

But what kind of law does Jesus refer to in today's gospel? The Law that our Lord refers to is the Law that Moses received from Mt. Sinai. It applies also to the first books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch) that include the Ten Commandments. For the Jews, the Law is the complete and precise expression of God's will; a complete and secure guide of conduct which govern the moral, religious and secular life of Israelites. And Jesus grew to adulthood as a devout Jew by living this Law. This Law explains God's commandments and ordinances as well as His whole teaching or way of life which He gives to His people. The law is also used to describe the scribal law. And Jesus often condemns this scribal law because it places burdens on people which God has not intended. However, Jesus makes it very clear that the essence of God's law which is His commandments and way of life must be fulfilled.

And so I would like you to join me in reflecting these three words of Jesus about the law:

First He says: "*I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.*" God prepares His people for salvation through the law and the prophets. And Christ comes in order to fulfil,

complete, perfect and bring to maturity the law and the prophets and give them its proper interpretation. His emphasis is on mercy and not on legalistic minutiae; on far-reaching love and not on destructive petty details; on positive heartfelt commitment and not on external prohibitions. And about fifteen times in the gospel of St. Matthew that Jesus mentions the word “fulfil.” But this law will not remain as a law but it must move also to our hearts as demonstrated by the Beatitudes.

Second He says: *“Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments...will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven.”* I read this first rule of the Teenage Creed that says: “Laws are meant to be broken.” Why this is so? Maybe because as we mature we discover so many “Do this, don’t do that” rules which are in conflicts with our subjective happiness. These rules are seemingly oppressive because they are in direct opposition to our personal fulfilment. And so we permit patterns of sin to develop despite what our consciences tell us. If this is the way, then the devil has wittingly suggested his criteria to us. If we are not careful, we may form attitudes that will make us struggle against God and His criteria: the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the cross and the teachings of the Church.

Third He says: *“Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”* Our true freedom lies not in the rejection but in the acceptance of God’s moral law. Moral law has “its origin in God and always finds its source in Him,” (Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*, no. 40). God is not a heartless dictator but a Father who loves us and wills our very best. He says: “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?” (Matthew 7:9-10). Jesus posits the question because he knows the Father and His law is a sign that He loves and cares for us. God is incapable of not desiring what is truly best for us. God is and will always be love. And we are meant to be with God forever. Try keeping that message just to yourself.

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**THURSDAY** - Luke 11:14-23

## Jesus and Beelzebul

Thomas Brooks has this to say about Satan. He says: "Satan promises the best but pays with the worst. He promises honor and pays with disgrace. He promises pleasure and pays with pain. He promises profit and pays with loss. He promises life and pays with death."

Because of Jesus' numerous healings and exorcisms to many people, these bring them freedom from troubles and oppression of evil spirits. But some of the Jewish leaders, in today's gospel, react vehemently to Jesus' healings and exorcisms and they oppose Him with malicious slander and resort to character assassination when honest opposition is hopeless. There is nothing as cruel and uncharitable as slander. They always tend to think the worst and very often people would prefer to hear the bad and the derogatory remarks rather than the good and complimentary story. Sometimes we are guilty of this particular sin too. How often do we deliberately repeat slanderous and malicious stories and murder reputations to someone whom we dislike over a cup of coffee?

The Jewish leaders ask: How can He get the power and authority to release individuals from Satan's power? They assume that He has to be in league with Satan. They attribute His power to Satan rather than to God. But Jesus answers them with this smart statement: "For you say that it is by Beelzebul that I drive out demons. If I, then, drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your own people drive them out? Therefore they will be your judges." It is as if Jesus is saying to them: "Yes, one of your fingers is pointing on me but look, the other three fingers are pointing on you too."

But I would like more to reflect about what Jesus is saying in today's gospel reading. He says: "Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters," (v.23). With Jesus we cannot evade decision; we cannot remain noncommittal; we cannot protect ourselves against risks. Why? It is because there is a cosmic war that is going on between good and evil. In this kind of war we cannot remain neutral or noncommittal. If we refuse to side with God, it can mean, we accept or take side with Satan. Now we know that God will eventually win this war. And so,

why we allow ourselves to be on the losing side? How to take side with God? It can be shown in this way:

First is *through our obedience to Him*. Jesus Himself encounters personal opposition and battles with Satan when He was put to the test in the wilderness just before His public ministry. But He overcomes the evil one through His obedience to the will of His Father. We can do the same. The call of obedience is disturbing since we human beings want freedom, choice and doing what feels good. And on the process, we misuse our freedom and choice. Sin enters and damages us spiritually. Therefore, we need obedience or relying on an authority outside of ourselves that guides us. We have to rely on God, His Word and Sacraments and the leaders He puts in charge of our lives.

Second is *by loyalty to Him*. I read this story of a young man in the army who made a confession to his compatriot that he never went about with another girl if he was within fifty miles of home, his loyalty went fifty miles away. How far does our loyalty to Jesus Christ go?

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**FRIDAY** - Mark 12:28-34

The Greatest Commandment

One day after I celebrated the morning Mass, a woman approached me because she wanted my advise. According to her that she committed a grave sin because she violated the third commandment of God which is, "to keep holy the Lord's Day." She told me that she missed the previous Sunday Mass since she could not leave her daughter who was badly ill at that day. I told her: "Ma'am, you would commit a mortal sin if you leave your ailing daughter and then go to Mass without somebody taking care for her." But I still listen to her.

In today's gospel, one of the scribes comes up to Jesus and asks Him an honest question that people also often ask: "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Actually there are six hundred thirteen precepts and the scribes made it a lifetime practice to study these six hundred thirteen precepts of the Old Testament along with

the numerous rabbinic commentaries. They make this question maybe to test and to see if Jesus correctly understands the law as they do. Or maybe the scribe is sincere too in asking such question because at the end he embraces Jesus' answer and makes it as his own. Jesus surprises them with His profound simplicity and mastery of the law of God and its purpose. Here Jesus lays out plainly and simply, how we must live our lives: loving God with everything we are and loving our neighbor as ourselves. The love of God comes first and the love of neighbor is firmly grounded in the love of God.

The first part of Jesus' answer is from the Book of Deuteronomy (6:4). This is called *Shema* or "Listen up!" This is important for the Jewish people because this is their morning and evening prayers. For them these are the words to live by as well as the words to die. This is the first sentence every Jewish child should memorize and the prayer every religious Jew hopes to have on their lips when they die.

The second part is taken from the Book of Leviticus (19:18). This second commandment is the manifestation of the first. There is an intimate connection between our love of God and love of our neighbor.

Christ gives us the two great commandments of love and calls us to live them but how? I read these three beautiful ways on how to live these commandments:

First, *Love through obedience*. God wants us to obey Him. The great opportunity to obey Him is here by doing what He gives us to do with all its ups and downs. God does not look at what actions we can carry out, rather, He looks to see if we are willing to submit our human will to His divine will. True love is shown by obedience.

Second, *Love through charity*. We Catholics are called to love God above all else and thus to love all men and women more than ourselves and without partiality. We cannot say that we love God if we do not live charity beyond the boundaries of our comfort zone. God is radical and calls us to love Him in others. "What you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do this to me," He said. True love is shown by our charity.

Third, *Love through prayer*. We are reminded by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 2658) that "love is the source of prayer.... It enables us to respond to Him by

loving as He has loved us.” To love God we need to obey and to love others more than ourselves. However, this is impossible without prayer. If prayer enables us to respond, it is only because prayer is where we transform our wills. Becoming like Christ is the purpose of prayer. To love Christ is to become like Christ. To make this change takes prayer. Thus true lovers pray.

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**SATURDAY** - Luke 18:9-14

### The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

An unknown source comes up with an article entitled, “How to be Miserable.” It says: “Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use “I” as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them. Never forget a service you have rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others.”

The Pharisee in today’s gospel clearly shows us how to be miserable and proud. He is enumerating all his achievements. He compares himself to the tax collector whom by his estimation is rather low. He says: “I am not like the rest of humanity: greedy, dishonest and adulterous.” He is always saying: “I, I, I.” He is really an authentic egoist. And so therefore, like the Pharisee, if we become self-centered and self-seeking, we become too proud and too self-righteous. No wonder that we find it very difficult to associate ourselves with proud people because they always look down or find faults in others.

On the other hand, the tax collector is the model, not of his sinfulness but of his humility to accept it, by which we should spend our life. He stands at the back of the temple and would not even lift his eyes. He never exalts himself. He bows his head and beat his breast which is a sign of his acceptance and acknowledgment of his unworthiness and sinfulness before God. He says: “O God, be merciful to me a

sinner.” And Christ says that he went home justified. We, like the tax collector, are all sinners too. None of us are justified or redeemed without God’s grace.

This gospel passage tells us something about humility that we should practice as followers of Christ:

First, it tells us that *humility comes from measuring ourselves against the greatness of God*. We know that pride always begins with comparing ourselves with others. But Jesus tells us that the only person we are allowed to compare ourselves to is, God the Father. This is a recipe for humility. He says: “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect,” (Matt 5:48). St. Augustine also insisted that there are three virtues which are essential for holiness or perfection: humility, humility and humility. If we want to live in humility, we have to keep our eyes on the perfections of God the Father and not on others.

Second, it tells us that *we have to pray to God with humility rather than with pride*. A humble prayer pleases God. God hears our prayers if we approach Him with humility. I think we are wondering why God accepts one person’s prayer and reject the other’s prayer. Jesus gives us a hint, that is, despising one’s neighbor closes the door to God’s heart. An example for this is the Pharisee by which he mainly prays with himself and disdains for those he despised. While the tax collector, humbles himself before God and begs for mercy. God answers His prayer because he has remorse for his sins. He seeks God with humility rather than with pride.

Third, it tells us that *humility demands charity*. We naturally tend to judge others. We compare ourselves to others and destroy their reputations through criticism, detraction or slander. But we forget that in God’s eyes, we have been given more and more will be expected from us by doing charity towards our neighbor. Let us always remember that God cannot be where there is no charity and authentic Christianity.

**Source: [justmehomily](#)**

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 for more reflections, [click here](#)

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