

September 6, 2020 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

What a great joy it is for all of us to gather together in the "*name of the Lord*" on this first September weekend. As we just heard Jesus promise in today's Gospel, He is always present when we gather in His Name, and pray for what we need in accordance with His Will. Labor Day weekend is always a holiday with built-in mixed emotions. It's always good to have some extra time to relax from our "labors" and give thanks to God for all His blessings. On the other hand, Labor Day typically marks the end of the "summer time" more relaxed mode, and a return to the busier and more normal time of the year, including the return to School at all levels of our educational processes. However, as we all know so well, this year is anything but "normal", so I guess we just wait and see what these post-Labor Day weeks might bring. Despite those mixed emotions, we still gather in the Name of Jesus, and celebrate who we are as God's holy people on this 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time---all of us gathered together, sisters and brothers in Christ.

The Scripture Readings for this Sunday have some pretty straightforward and frank messages for all of us to hear. Each of the Readings deal with the effects of sin, and what our responsibility is in regard to those effects, both in terms of our own personal accountability, as well as our responsibility to, and for, one another's sins.

Before we can talk about sin or dealing with effects of sin, though, we have to state the obvious, namely what is God's holy will--what is His Plan for us? Since the beginning of creation and the first human beings, it was, and continues to be, God's plan for people to live together in peace and harmony. God's vision of perfection is His creation living together in unity. Sin, by its very nature, disrupts unity---creates disharmony---breaks the relationship of love with God and with our neighbor. God's Word consistently focuses on ways to restore our unity. And of course, God's Incarnate Word---His Word made Flesh in Jesus---was the fulfillment of God's Plan to re-claim that lost unity by sending Jesus to reconcile the world.

And so in our First Reading, we heard that God commissioned His Prophet Ezekiel to be a "*watchman*" over the House of Israel, and God charged him to "*warn them for Me*" to help them to turn away from their sins and be restored to

unity. If the wrongdoers ignored Ezekiel, well they would suffer the consequences; but if Ezekiel didn't reach out in Love to "warn" them, he too would be held accountable.

In today's Gospel, we heard Jesus tell His disciples----and us---that "*if your brother sins against you*", what we, as His followers, are supposed to do to restore that broken unity; or to put it another way, how we are to "speak the Truth in Love". The "4-point Plan" that Jesus proposes is reasoned, methodical and perfectly follows the principle of subsidiarity.

Jesus, Who is the Head of the Body, gives us very specific direction for how we are to live together as Members of His Body. He lays out that "4-point plan", which surprisingly begins, not with the sinner, but with the one against whom the sin has been committed. That's pretty amazing, in and of itself. The one who is offended is the one charged with beginning the process to try to restore the relationship by first going to the one who committed the sin to offer reconciliation. Perhaps the sinner did what he/she did by mistake, or was not aware, or was having a bad day; whatever the reason, Jesus charges the one offended with the responsibility to begin the process to restore unity. And Jesus does not let it end there. If the one who committed the offense does not accept the offer of reconciliation, there are several more steps Jesus directs be taken before concluding that perhaps this relationship can not be restored, at least not at this time.

That is one of the reasons why it is so important for all of us to always remain connected to Jesus through His Church. Each of us has been baptized into the Body of Christ; we belong with pride to the Catholic Church. That is why we see our homes as Domestic Churches where we live out our faith and support, encourage and teach one another in the ways of faith; and that is precisely why we belong to our Parishes where we come to celebrate our Faith---and to be able to share in the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Unity, whenever we are able to do so. And that is to result in helping us to live our lives in Love.

In a recent Audience, Pope Francis talked about what he referred to as "parochial sins". He talked about how our parishes are supposed to be places where we come together to build one another up, but sometimes, the Holy Father said, we can turn them into places where sins such as "envy, jealousy, or gossip" have the opposite effect. He concluded: "Division in a Christian community, whether in a school a parish or an association, is a very grave

sin....Instead, God wants us towelcome, forgive and love each other.” Our parishes, and certainly our homes, are to be the places where we celebrate who we are---our oneness in the Lord and our membership in the Body of Christ. When we belong to Jesus’ Church, He is always with us; as Jesus tells us in today’s Gospel: *“Wherever two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

Jesus is our Savior. He is also our Teacher and our Model for how we are to live. Jesus showed us most dramatically what it means to “lay down one’s life for one’s friends in Love”---all we need to do is gaze upon the Crucifix! Perhaps St. Paul said it best in today’s Second Reading in his Letter to the Romans: *“Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law....Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.”* May we live our Faith, teach our Faith, spread our Faith, and defend our Faith with the LOVE and the JOY of Christ all the days of our lives, both here in this world, as well as in the life of the world to come.

God bless you, now and always.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley