

Tenth Sunday in ordinary time June 10, 2018

Genesis 3: 9-15, 2 Corinthians 4:13:5:1, Mark 3:20-35

In any society, family relationships are extremely important. The family has its meals together, stays together and supports one another. The church teaches us the importance of the family where the seed of faith is planted. Every person looks towards his or her family for support and even guidance. Jesus uses this concept of family to cause His followers to judge their relationships in the light of the criterion of the Father's will. The reign of God makes demands on the personal commitment of a disciple, which must transcend at times all natural bonds of family or ethnic grouping. In the first reading, the authors of Genesis posit what they understood to be the cause of sin and evil in the world, viz., and humankind's choice of its own willfulness over obedience to the loving will of God. As a result of sin, the struggle between good and evil became an inherent aspect of the human experience. This struggle of strike and counterstrike continues unabated but not unaided. As Paul points out to his readers in Corinthians in the second reading, God's grace is bestowed in abundance in order that we may not lose heart as we struggle. In today's gospel, Jesus is accused of being in collusion with Satan or, at the very least, of being out of his mind. As members of that family, Mark's gospel reminds us that doing the will of God will require that we sharpen our sensitivities to sin and to goodness so as to be able to truly recognize each for what it is, call it by name and live accordingly.

God named the man, and called him Adam, who signifies red earth; Adam named the woman, and called her Eve, that is, life. Adam bears the name of the dying body, Eve of the living soul. Adam probably had regard to the blessing of a Redeemer, the promised Seed, in calling his wife Eve, or life; for He should be the life of all believers, and in Him all the families of the earth should be blessed. See also God's care for our first parents, notwithstanding their sin. This state of sin or disobedience to God must have been suggested and induced in the first inhabitants of the earth by some evil power, here called a serpent, and later identified with Satan, the leader of the evil spirits. This sad state of the world would be corrected one day by a descendent of Abraham and break the vicious power that Satan has over mankind. The serpent's head would eventually be crushed even the victor too would suffer much in the combat. This is the earliest choice, an unique choice made by God of persons to belong to him. While this is all a sad commentary on the weakness and folly of our human nature that sin has been in the world from the beginning, we can at the same time find great consolation in the thought

that God's infinite love and mercy for us was infinitely greater than and stronger than the weight of our sins. It was God's plan to send his son to unite us to himself. Because of the love of God gates of heaven are open and nothing can take us away from it.

In the daily struggle to cope with sin and evil, Paul's words remind us that we are not alone; God's supporting and sustaining grace is ever present. Moreover, our ancient forebear in the faith encourages us to look beyond the struggle with sure hope to what lies ahead. By faith, Paul could be certain that human existence is not a hapless series of coincidences but a life ordered to the benefit of humanity by God. Paul's faith assured him of God's continuing assistance; with grace bestowed in abundance, believers become capable of facing the exigencies of life with equanimity and the joys of life with gratitude. Paul's description of his body being destroyed may refer to an illness or disability which was becoming increasingly evident. Others believe that Paul was simply acknowledging the fact that the many sufferings and hardships he had endured during his ministry were beginning to take their toll on his physical health and stamina. He calls them all slight and momentary afflictions as he was comparing them with eternal glory. For him no earthly suffering could seem of any importance. His appreciation of the sufferings of innocent Christ made him to emulate the example of the master. Nevertheless, Paul did not lose heart because his inner being, i.e., his spirit was being renewed daily. This renewal of grace enabled Paul to consider the burden of his sufferings as light when compared with the eternal weight of glory yet to come.

Mark's gospel begins with John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. After His temptation in the desert, Jesus sets out to call His disciples; working miracles around the Sea of Galilee. Our reading for today occurs immediately after Jesus appoints the twelve apostles. Today's gospel begins and ends with the theme of family, which is sandwiched between a dispute about the relationship of Jesus to the world of demonic power. The gospel begins with the family of Jesus questioning his sanity. For many, the message that Jesus proclaimed was troubling and upsetting, and so his family began to wonder if he is out of his mind. This is followed by the narrative of the Scribes asking about the power of Jesus. Did his power come from "Beelzebub," the name of an unclean spirit in Jewish literature, who is perhaps a demonic prince. Jesus brilliantly responds by turning the tables on them. It is not Jesus but those whose hearts are hardened (through rejecting God's representative) who are in danger of irrevocably separating themselves from God's

friendship. The gospel then returns to the theme of family. The bonds of our relationship with Jesus result from doing the will of God. Each of us is challenged to conversion.

In Jewish society, family relationships are extremely important. The family took its meals together and aided one another. Jesus uses this concept of family to cause His followers to judge their relationships in the light of the criterion of the Father's will. The reign of God makes demands on the personal commitment of a disciple, which must transcend at times all natural bonds of family or ethnic grouping. "It is He who said that no one belongs to His family except those who do the will of His Father. To be sure, He graciously included Mary herself in this number, for she was doing the will of His Father. Thus He spurned the earthly name of His mother in comparison to heavenly kinship. ... Do not be ungrateful, pay your duty of gratitude to your mother, repay earthly favors by spiritual ones, temporal by eternal ones"

Jesus clearly states that in doing the will of God one becomes part of the family of God. In a world where often inheritance, wealth, or being born into the right family gives special privileges, we see Jesus changing all of that. Through our Baptism, we are born again and become adopted sons and daughters of God. And because we are children of God, we are called to act like children of God. This means living the Beatitudes and all of Jesus' teachings. The way that Jesus lived his life gives us the perfect example of doing the will of God. We too are called to live as Jesus taught us to live. "It is He who said that no one belongs to His family except those who do the will of His Father. To be sure, He graciously included Mary herself in this number, for she was doing the will of His Father. Thus He spurned the earthly name of His mother in comparison to heavenly kinship. ... Do not be ungrateful, pay your duty of gratitude to your mother, repay earthly favors by spiritual ones, temporal by eternal ones"

Today's Gospel reading along with the first reading demonstrates one great truth as explained in the Book of Proverbs: "Pride goes before destruction." Pride induced the first parents to disobey God. They wished to be independent of him; in fact they hoped that they would be equal to him in every way. Such pride existed during the time of Jesus as it still exists in today's modern world. It was their sinful pride, their sense of superiority, their utter contempt for all who did not conform to their standard of observance that led the Scribes and Pharisees to oppose Jesus. Blinded as they were by this deep rooted pride, they would see nothing good in him. Absurdly they explained whatever he did as the work of Satan particularly the miracles he worked and

the healing he did. To any honest mind these miracles proved that he was at least a friend of God or a person with the power of God. The Scribes and Pharisees continued to remain blind attributing absurd reasons for the miracles that Jesus worked. They could not accept him as the messiah the son of God.

While we thank God that none of us perhaps has the same exalted opinion about himself or herself as the Scribes and the Pharisees had, there is much pride in even the best of us. It is still the root of all the evil that is in our world. If all observed the commands and dictates of the Lord and followed our conscience perfectly, it would make the journey of all surer, safe and heaven easier. But these are violated daily, knowingly or unknowingly. That is because of the pride that is within us and we do not like to be restricted by someone else's actions or dictates. They cannot admit any higher power has the right to regulate their lives. They indeed choose to do as they please.

There appears to be a tendency in contemporary society to disregard or minimize sin or to call it by another name. Similarly, there is a tendency to ignore evil and to behave as if the reality of evil had faded into obsolescence. The reality of sin, however, has not disappeared; it has simply been renamed. Sin may masquerade under several aliases, but it remains, nonetheless what it is. The readings for today's liturgy invite the gathered assembly to take a hard look at sin, to call it by name and to take back our responsibility for it. Similarly, we are challenged to look evil in the eye and, without blinking, own it for the reality that it is. As Paul points out to his readers in Corinthians in the second reading, God's grace is bestowed in abundance in order that we may not lose heart as we struggle. In today's gospel, Jesus is accused of being in collusion with Satan or, at the very least, of being out of his mind. Putting evil in its place and naming sin for what it is, the Marcan Jesus reminds us that sin and evil must be confronted; the relationship we were meant to enjoy with God will be restored when we learn to do as Jesus did. . . to do the will of God in all we are, in all we do.

However, even when free human choices cause things to go awry, God does not turn away, leaving them to their own designs. As the ancient Yahwistic author points out, God comes searching, "Where are you?" Face to face with God, sinful humanity becomes aware of itself and its deeds and is ashamed. In God's presence however, no alibi can substitute for the truth. Adam blamed Eve and indirectly accused God. . . "The woman whom you put here with me. . ." Eve blamed the serpent. But all were in collusion and all were held

accountable. Gradually, the serpent became associated with evil and the image with which today's first reading concludes represents the ongoing struggle between good and evil which is the human experience. Like dominoes toppling, all of humanity has been affected by sin, not because it is genetically transmitted but because of the solidarity of the human community. However, the solidarity with God which has been extended to each of us, in Jesus, enables us to find courage in the struggle; in Jesus, we have been assured that goodness will never be overcome by evil.

As Jesus went about doing good and proclaiming the nearness of the reign of God, some of his closest contemporaries thought he was out of his mind (v. 21). Although they remained sympathetic to him, Jesus' family was hard pressed to understand how he had chosen to live his life. He had left his home at Nazareth along with the carpenter business he had probably inherited. In their eyes, he had thrown away security and safety and chosen a path which appeared to be on a collision course with the civil and religious authorities of his day.

The readings of today give us clear indication as to how we ought to live and place ourselves in divine presence. We are all aware that we are living in what is politely called as the permissive age. People easily fall prey to various types of attractions and the divine laws are shamelessly broken and despised. People do not have the attitude of sin in them and they are least concerned whether their actions offend God and their neighbour. There is negligence shown towards the good intended to show towards others. People look for individual comfort and tend to neglect the elders, homeless, refugees and persons in need. Today's readings lead us to understand the need of others. Let us make our Eucharistic celebration a time to understand the divine presence in others, that we are a mystical body as persons committed to Christ. Let us sacrifice ourselves for the good of others and give our hearts wholly for the fellow human beings.

A man was being chased by a tiger. He ran as fast as he could until he was at the edge of a cliff with the tiger in hot pursuit. The man saw a branch growing out of the side of the cliff a few feet down. He jumped down and grabbed the branch just as the tiger reached the cliff. The tiger growled viciously as the man sighed a great sigh of relief. Just then a mouse came out from a crevice and began to chew on the branch. The man looked down to what was a drop of a thousand feet and sure death and looked to the heavens and yelled out, "Dear God, if you are there, please help. I will do anything you ask." Suddenly a voice

came booming down from heaven: that is what human beings do when they are in trouble. Now will you do anything I ask?" it questioned. The man yelled back, "I will gladly do anything you ask, but please save me." The voice from heaven then replied, "There is one way to save you but it will take courage and faith." The branch began to weaken from the mouse and the tiger was still growling a few feet above the man, "Please, Lord, tell me what I must do." The voice from heaven then said, "All right then, let go of the branch." The man looked down to a fall of a thousand feet and certain death. He looked up at the hungry tiger a few feet away and the mouse. Then he looked up at the heavens and yelled, "Is there anyone else up there?"

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