



Come and See!

Week of September 15, 2019

The Word...

“Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense...
A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit.”

(from Ps 51)

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.
But for that reason I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost,
Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example
for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life.”

(from 1 Tm 1:12-17)

“In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing
among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

(from Lk 15:1-32)

Pondering the Word...

Two themes run through the readings this week: the temptation to sin that money and power present to us; and, God’s unending mercy. These themes track each other throughout all of Biblical history, and yet so often, the one that gets the most focus is the first: our propensity towards sin.

When I meet people for spiritual companioning, I rarely hear about the joy God’s forgiveness has brought to their lives. I mostly hear from people who feel they are unforgiveable, unredeemable. I can relate. When Jesus says there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, I think of the numerous times in my life I have been “the party excuse for the month!” I remember my own spiritual director pointing out this passage from Paul’s first letter to Timothy: “Listen, if I am redeemable, anyone can be redeemed!”

I know how easy it is to get wrapped up in my unworthiness, but I also know the tendency towards self-focus is, in itself, the temptation to power, the false belief that I somehow control God’s love. By deeming myself unredeemable, I deny the covenant God made with his people, brought to completion in the birth, death, and resurrection of his Son. (Of course, it took me time to get over that sin of pride as well!)

If you struggle with doubt at your worthiness in the eyes of God, take heart. None of us are worthy—even the most saintly among us—none of us are worthy. All God asks is that we recognize our reliance on him through the sacrifice of a contrite spirit. Let’s keep our focus on the unending, unchanging mercy God offers us every moment of every day, and how that mercy can help to create in us a clean heart and steadfast spirit.

Living the Word...

I pray for every person reading this who is caught in the web of sin or trapped by the sins of the past. Don’t despair. Seek healing with a caring confessor, spiritual companion, or pastoral counselor. No, the sins do not magically disappear, but they can be transformed into the most amazing source of joy in your life! Trust me.

Personal Reflections and Ideas...

Sep 16: *"Beloved: I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life.... It is my wish that in every place men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument."* (1 Tm 2:1-8)

Do I pray for world leaders, especially those in my own country? We often say prayers for government and church leaders at Mass, but as I sit here typing away, I do not see one of their names on the prayer wall in front of me. Oh, but I can sure get angry and into arguments about them! Paul's advice is wise. I should pray for those who lead us, but I also must remember to do what I can to bring about quiet and tranquility in the lives of people I encounter. *"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."*

Sep 17: *"I will walk with blameless heart within my house...Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I destroy. The man of haughty eyes and puffed up heart I will not endure. My eyes are upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me. He who walks in the way of integrity shall be in my service."* (Ps 101)

This psalm calls to mind the people for whom Jesus has little patience or sympathy: hypocrites. Those who present themselves as honorable in public but who are greedy, lascivious, slanderous, or haughty in the privacy of their own homes. People who look down on others and have inflated egos—these he will not endure. Those who are faithful, who have integrity—these are the ones who will dwell in the house of the Lord. It is easy for me to point at many of those in power as being the ones who will be judged harshly, and indeed, they may well be. But let me not forget to turn the mirror on myself. Is the person people see when they encounter me the same person I am when I'm alone with my thoughts?

Sep 18: *"... he will forever be mindful of his covenant."* (Ps 111)

God is not like us. God does not forget his promises, does not turn away from us, no matter how many times we fail to keep our commitment and turn away from him. God will forever be mindful of his covenant. What an incredible thing! Let us not be afraid to return again and again to the source of all comfort and joy!

Sep 19: *"Do not neglect the gift you have...Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you."* (1 Tm 4:12-16)

Such an important message for those involved in service to God's people (and, BTW, that's supposed to mean all of us)! How often do we see the irony of the medical professional so busy that they fail to take care of their health; or, of the financial planner who does not have their own financial plan? If you are involved in any caring profession: teachers, doctors, nurses, police, EMTs, and firefighters; those who work in social services, with the disabled, counselors, and on social justice causes; those who care for the sick and dying; ministers and parents: Attend to yourself and let God attend to you. You cannot give what you do not have.

Sep 20: *"Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation...For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith."* (1 Tm 6:2c-12)

You know, money can do amazing things. It can rebuild lives shattered by natural disasters. It can eradicate diseases. While having enough of it to afford a decent life for one's family can't buy happiness, it can sure help to reduce stress and add to the quality of life. Money in and of itself is not a bad thing. But our relationship to money and to what it can buy can cause even the most level-headed of people to lose sight of what's really important. Let's pay attention to the words of Psalm 49 we hear today: *"They trust in their wealth; the abundance of their riches is their boast. Yet in no way can a man redeem himself, or pay his own ransom to God; though in his lifetime he counted himself blessed, he shall join the circle of his forebears who shall never more see light."*

Sep 21: *"Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."* (Mt 9:9-13)

Remember the line from the beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures? God created us in his own image. He created us to be merciful, compassionate, patient as God is with us. Our God is not like other gods that demand elaborate sacrifices. Just that contrite heart we talked about on Sunday, and the willingness to forgive as God forgives us, sinners that we are. *"There are two kinds of people: the righteous who believe themselves sinners; and, the rest, who believe themselves righteous."*(Blaise Pascal)