

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (9/20/2020)

Jesus gives us an important lesson as to what is important and where priority should lie. Too often we can be tempted to seek to be recognized, we look to be well regarded. We can do many things to see that this happens - some of these things take time and attention that is best directed to our duties to the Lord, some of these things we do for recognition actually debase ourselves. We can take time that belongs to God to invest it in frivolous activities with the hope of gaining human recognition, or we can compromise our values in order to appear to others in ways that we think will make them look better at us. These misplaced energies actually take us away from seeking the recognition of the one who loves us most - God.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus is in the home of a chief pharisee - mind you this was not to gain some sort of status. We know this because of what follows in his speaking, but also because of Our Lord's habit of engaging with the most socially outcast. He does not care to allow Mary Magdalene to touch him when in the home of a prominent man - he does not fear that his association with a known prostitute will tarnish his standing with the prominent members of society. How many of us would have brushed her off so not to be seen to associate with her and risk the admiration of others. He attends this meal not for his own sake or advancement, but for the advancement of the Kingdom. He breaks bread in a high official's house, not to be elevated to a high plan in the order of human standings, but to elevate that man to a higher place of standing in the only social order that really matters - the Kingdom of God.

Jesus makes the effort to heal on the Sabbath, not out of disrespect for the law, but to show the hypocritical type of observance of that law that his host engaged in. This pharisee would seek to elevate his social standing as a devout member of the religious leadership by scrupulously avoiding physical effort on the Sabbath. The idea being that the law is about the amount of calories you expend, as opposed to an attitude of the heart. The proscription against work on the sabbath is not just to stop work for its own sake, but to avoid the devotion to work, the slavery to achievement, and the focus on task completion that can interfere with contemplating the Lord on the Sabbath. Jesus clearly points out that despite the so-called restriction of work, anyone would save his ox if it fell into the pit on the sabbath. Ones were valuable, and one would suspend the work prohibition to save that loss. In other words, they

were already making exceptions to the Sabbath rest law - but for their own benefits. Jesus will heal at other places on the Sabbath. This is not work that distracts from God, this is not unnecessary labor that could be preformed easily on another day, this is not about a suspension of the law for his benefit. The healing of this man is an activity that directs one to God. Just like the work of the priests in the temple slaughtering animals on the Sabbath is an action that is drifted to God. Activity that is holy and directs to God is not a violation of the Sabbath, however, that activity which is self-centered, or unnecessary, or aimed at our own self-glorification does violate the commandment to keep the sabbath holy.

It is really about which order we wish to advanced in. To advance in the order of humans you must work at human pursuits on the sabbath (to outpace others in competition with you for affections). You must move yourself to higher places of respect and admiration so that you increase your standing with others. The sabbath rest, the glory of God takes a second place to ambition. Raising higher in God's eyes takes a backseat to rising higher in human eyes. We use the Sabbath either to grow closer to God and to more glory in his kingdom, or to raise ourselves higher in the kingdom of humanity. As Jesus tells us at the end of the Gospel - the one who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted. The one who humbles himself and does not fall for the trappings of human affection will be exalted in heaven. Jesus himself is a model of this For though he was it he form of God he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped - but rather humbled himself.

Whether we humble ourself by directing our Sabbath energies to the holy (and turn down opportunities for other human advancements), whether we risk the disdain of others by doing as God demands or by acting counter to the ways of the world (by sitting int the lower place) - we can expect that the Lord will come to us with an exalting that is far superior to anything that the world can give us.