

Joy of the Gospel Study Guide for September 20, 2015

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Theme: TRUST that if I act like Jesus, God will work powerfully in my life, and will work powerfully through me for the sake of others.

Reflection

In From today's letter by James, we can see that we human beings are often willing to sacrifice the common good for our own self-interest; we measure the severity of a problem solely by its impact on us. In stark contrast to self-centeredness, Jesus, in the Gospel, challenges us to seek the greatness of being last, of being a servant to others, for example, by advocating for the poor and marginalized. Jesus invites us to learn greater compassion; to grow in Christian maturity by promoting the well-being and the full human flourishing of all God's children.

Many voices in our culture feed our innate desire to be first, at the top, in charge; to be influential and well respected. "Servant-hood" brings us far beyond these natural desires, to a participation in God's very own desire, both for us and for the whole world. Sharing God's desire leads us in turn far beyond a natural joy (that waxes and wanes), to a divine joy that abides and grows ever deeper.

Questions for discussion

1. *The Letter of James* exhorts us to be "fruitful", as defined by "the wisdom from above." Such fruitfulness is "full of mercy", which contrasts with our natural tendency to "selfish ambition." From St. Ignatius, Pope Francis knows that mercy, to be genuine, must be *felt*, felt for example in "weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them" (51). Note the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12). How can we bring into our prayer life an experience of mercy that extends beyond the boundaries of our friends and families?
2. Pope Francis claims that we have a "grave responsibility" to fight trends that lead to "dehumanization" (51). What are some of the ways in which people are currently being dehumanized? If God has a "plan" for the world, what does he expect of us by way of our fighting against dehumanizing trends?

3. "The majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day" (52). The Pope is speaking mainly of people in developing countries. The Pope also quotes St. John Chrysostom, "Not to share one's wealth with the poor is to steal from them" (57). What responsibility, if any, do we living in Salem, NH have for poverty in foreign countries?
4. Jesus in the Gospel invites us to a mindset radically different from the norm, a mindset of wanting to be "the servant of all." If I listen to Jesus and dedicate myself as a servant of those around me, I will find the divine peace James talk about. The change in me will be a living invitation to others to embrace the wisdom of Jesus. This is one way to make a difference in the world, that is, through a ripple effect. Am I excited at the thought of making a new level of commitment to the Gospel message?
5. Am I, are we, committed as was James to responding like Jesus, the source of all wisdom? Do I see any evidence that God does more to help the world when believers actually do respond like Jesus? If not, are we left to face global problems with merely human strength and wisdom?

Scripture Readings for the Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

WIS 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say: Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Responsorial Psalm

PS 54:34, 5, 6 AND 8

R. (6b) **The Lord upholds my life.**

O God, by your name save me,
and by your might defend my cause.

O God, hear my prayer;
hearken to the words of my mouth.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

For the haughty men have risen up against me,
the ruthless seek my life;
they set not God before their eyes.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord sustains my life.
Freely will I offer you sacrifice;
I will praise your name, O LORD, for its goodness.

R. **The Lord upholds my life.**

Reading 2

JAS 3:16—4:3

Beloved: Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace. Where do the wars

and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Alleluia

CF. 2 THESS 2:14

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

God has called us through the Gospel
to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

MK 9:3037

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.” But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.

They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” Taking a child, he placed it in the their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them. “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.”

Readings from *The Joy of the Gospel*

CHAPTER TWO: AMID THE CRISIS OF COMMUNAL COMMITMENT

The mysterious working of the risen Christ and his Spirit

50. Before taking up some basic questions related to the work of evangelization, it may be helpful to mention briefly the context in which we all have to live and work. Today, we frequently hear of a “diagnostic overload” which is not always accompanied by improved and actually applicable methods of treatment. Nor would we be well served by a purely sociological analysis which would aim to embrace all of reality by employing an allegedly neutral and clinical method. What I would like to propose is something much more in the line of an evangelical discernment. It is the approach of a missionary disciple, an approach “nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit”.

51. It is not the task of the Pope to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality, but I do exhort all the communities to an “ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times”.⁵⁴ This is in fact a grave responsibility, since certain present realities, unless effectively dealt with, are capable of setting off processes

⁵Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964), 19: AAS 56 (1964), 609.

of dehumanization which would then be hard to reverse. We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God’s plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also – and this is decisive – choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil. I take for granted the different analyses which other documents of the universal magisterium have offered, as well as those proposed by the regional and national conferences of bishops. In this Exhortation I claim only to consider briefly, and from a pastoral perspective, certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God’s people or because they

affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work of evangelization.

I. Some challenges of today's world

52. In our time humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education and communications. At the same time we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences. A number of diseases are spreading. The hearts of many people are gripped by fear and desperation, even in the so-called rich countries. The joy of living frequently fades, lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident. It is a struggle to live and, often, to live with precious little dignity. This epochal change has been set in motion by the enormous qualitative, quantitative, rapid and cumulative advances occurring in the sciences and in technology, and by their instant application in different areas of nature and of life. We are in an age of knowledge and information, which has led to new and often anonymous kinds of power.

No to an economy of exclusion

53. Just as the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" sets a clear limit in order to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say "thou shalt not" to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality. Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape. Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a "throw away" culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those

excluded are no longer society's underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”.

54. In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase. In the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us.

No to the new idolatry of money

55. One cause of this situation is found in our relationship with money, since we calmly accept its dominion over ourselves and our societies. The current financial crisis can make us overlook the fact that it originated in a profound human crisis: the denial of the primacy of the human person! We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:135) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption.

56. While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to

exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. Debt and the accumulation of interest also make it difficult for countries to realize the potential of their own economies and keep citizens from enjoying their real purchasing power. To all this we can add widespread corruption and self-serving tax evasion, which have taken on worldwide dimensions. The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.

No to a financial system which rules rather than serves

57. Behind this attitude lurks a rejection of ethics and a rejection of God. Ethics has come to be viewed with a certain scornful derision. It is seen as counterproductive, too human, because it makes money and power relative. It is felt to be a threat, since it condemns the manipulation and debasement of the person. In effect, ethics leads to a God who calls for a committed response which is outside the categories of the marketplace. When these latter are absolutized, God can only be seen as uncontrollable, unmanageable, even dangerous, since he calls human beings to their full realization and to freedom from all forms of enslavement. Ethics – a non-ideological ethics – would make it possible to bring about balance and a more humane social order. With this in mind, I encourage financial experts and political leaders to ponder the words of one of the sages of antiquity: “Not to share one’s wealth with the poor is to steal from them and to take away their livelihood. It is not our own goods which we hold, but theirs”

58. A financial reform open to such ethical considerations would require a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders. I urge them to face this challenge with determination and an eye to the future, while not ignoring, of course, the specifics of each case. Money must serve, not rule! The Pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings.

No to the inequality which spawns violence

59. Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode. When a society – whether local, national or global – is willing to leave a part of itself on the fringes, no political programs or resources spent on law enforcement or surveillance systems can indefinitely guarantee tranquility. This is not the case simply because inequality provokes a violent reaction from those excluded from the system, but because the socioeconomic system is unjust at its root. Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future. We are far from the so called “end of history”, since the conditions for a sustainable and peaceful development have not yet been adequately articulated and realized.

60. Today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. It serves only to offer false hopes to those clamoring for heightened security, even though nowadays we know that weapons and violence, rather than providing solutions, create new and more serious conflicts. Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalizations, they claim that the solution is an “education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes even more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries – in their governments, businesses and institutions – whatever the political ideology of their leaders.