

Study Guide for September 27, 2015

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Theme: HUMILITY; CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Reflection

The psalmist today says, "Who can detect failings? Cleanse me from my unknown faults!" This is one aspect of humility, acknowledging that one has faults to which he is blind. We pray for this humility in the Confiteor ("my grievous fault") and in the Our Father ("forgive us as we forgive").

Humility also has a deferential component. A humble person is happy to see others get what they deserve to receive--perhaps with a bonus! This is a far cry from the people addressed in the Letter of James, who feel entitled even to the point of stealing from the poor.

In the Gospel, Jesus indicates that living a holy life is mandatory, not optional. We face serious consequences when we yes to sin. Jesus uses dramatic imagery to inspire us to let go of any apparent gain that could have bad--eternally bad--consequences.

Questions for discussion

1 - The psalmist acknowledges his unknown faults. A large part of the spiritual journey, according to St. John of the Cross, is coming to awareness of the reality and consequences of my own sin, my own "grievous fault". What can I do to facilitate this process of coming to know, with mind and heart, my unknown faults? Having prayed and reflected on what Pope Francis says in *Joy of the Gospel* sec. 2, how might I move in a direction opposed to the faults he mentions?

2 - "Hanging in there" is an expression often heard in response to the question "How are you?" This is an example of what Pope Francis calls a "listless" spirit (sec. 2), a condition he blames in part on consumerism. A listless spirit to the "Joy of the Gospel" that "fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (sec. 1). For millennia God has given human beings

remarkable gifts (as shown in today's first reading), among which is a Divine Joy which "always endures ... even amid the greatest distress" (sec. 6) . Consider the remarkable Scripture citations on joy listed in sec. 5. Do I really believe that these promises of joy are meant for me? How can joy remain present in times of distress (as Scripture, Pope Francis, and the saints attest)?

3 - Pope Francis says that we of the developed world "find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met," while among the poor are found "the most beautiful expressions of joy" (7). What conditions do I feel must be met before I can have the joy promised by Scripture (sec. 5)? At what times in my life have I experienced joy in the midst of difficulties?

4 - In today's Gospel, Jesus gives a stern warning against scandal. The word scandal evokes thoughts of sexual sin, but could scandal not be applied as well to the disparity between our American lifestyle and that found in most of the world? When I was in India, I slept on a 3-inch mat atop a piece of plywood, an appurtenance that my retreat master called a high luxurious bed! That bed is in stark contrast to the mattress and box spring I now have. In what ways might I simplify my lifestyle, in order to make more of the world's resources available to others?

Readings from *The Joy of the Gospel*

1. The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come.

2. The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience. Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there

is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

5. The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice. A few examples will suffice. "Rejoice!" is the angel's greeting to Mary (Lk 1:28). Mary's visit to Elizabeth makes John leap for joy in his mother's womb (cf. Lk 1:41). In her song of praise, Mary proclaims: "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:47). When Jesus begins his ministry, John cries out: "For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled" (Jn 3:29). Jesus himself "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Lk 10:21). His message brings us joy: "I have said these things to you, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). Our Christian joy drinks of the wellspring of his brimming heart. He promises his disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy" (Jn 16:20). He then goes on to say: "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22). The disciples "rejoiced" (Jn 20:20) at the sight of the risen Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christians "ate their food with glad and generous hearts" (2:46). Wherever the disciples went, "there was great joy" (8:8); even amid persecution they continued to be "filled with joy" (13:52). The newly baptized eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" (8:39), while Paul's jailer "and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God" (16:34). Why should we not also enter into this great stream of joy?

6. There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter. I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress: "My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten

what happiness is... But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness... It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:17, 21-23, 26).

7. Sometimes we are tempted to find excuses and complain, acting as if we could only be happy if a thousand conditions were met. To some extent this is because our "technological society has succeeded in multiplying occasions of pleasure, yet has found it very difficult to engender joy". I can say that the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, even amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."

8. Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption. We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?

Scripture Readings from Today's Mass

Reading 1

NM 11:25-29

The LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses.

Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses,

the LORD bestowed it on the seventy elders;
and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied.

Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad,
were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp.
They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent;
yet the spirit came to rest on them also,
and they prophesied in the camp.

So, when a young man quickly told Moses,
"Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, "
Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said,
"Moses, my lord, stop them."
But Moses answered him,
"Are you jealous for my sake?
Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!
Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

Responsorial Psalm

PS 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14

R. (9a) The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

Though your servant is careful of them,
very diligent in keeping them,
Yet who can detect failings?
Cleanse me from my unknown faults!

From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant;
 let it not rule over me.
 Then shall I be blameless and innocent
 of serious sin.

Reading 2

JAS 5:1-6

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.
 Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,
 your gold and silver have corroded,
 and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
 it will devour your flesh like a fire.
 You have stored up treasure for the last days.
 Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
 who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
 and the cries of the harvesters
 have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
 You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
 you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
 You have condemned;
 you have murdered the righteous one;
 he offers you no resistance.

Alleluia

CF. JN 17:17B, 17A

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Your word, O Lord, is truth;
 consecrate us in the truth.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

MK 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

At that time, John said to Jesus,
"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name,
and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."

Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.

There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name
who can at the same time speak ill of me.

For whoever is not against us is for us.

Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink
because you belong to Christ,
amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,
it would be better for him if a great millstone
were put around his neck
and he were thrown into the sea.

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter into life maimed
than with two hands to go into Gehenna,
into the unquenchable fire.

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter into life crippled
than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye
than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna,
where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"