

2020 September 27

Twenty-sixth Sunday of the Ordinary Time

Readings:

First: Ezekiel 18.25-28, "You say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.'" (25a)

Psalm 25, "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your path" (4)

Second: Philippians 2.1-11, "He humbled himself and became obedient." (8a)

Gospel: Mathew 21.28-32, "The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." (31c)

Fast track for the unvirtuous

The words of Jesus in today's gospel have to be read along with Ezekiel's prophecy in the first reading, "When the wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is lawful and right, they shall save their life." (Ezekiel 18.27)

There is a basic difference in the mindset of the wicked and the virtuous. The former most often are aware of their wickedness and sinfulness, and therefore, their unworthiness for God's mercy and forgiveness. Hence if at all they are before God to pray, they would be most humble and would confess before the Lord that they are truly unworthy of his mercy. Yet they might pray for God's mercy, like the sinner in the temple along with the Pharisee. Without daring to lift his face up to the lord, and beating his breast, the sinner prayed, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18.13b)

The difference between the virtuous and the wicked is likely to be their attitude toward God and their self-awareness. Before God very often the so-called virtuous people, the regular churchgoers, may have a feeling of entitlement, like the Pharisee. That is, we may carry a feeling that we are the privileged ones with God in contrast to the so-called unvirtuous or wicked. True, we are the privileged ones because God loves us. However, when we translate God's love for us as an entitled reward for our 'virtuous life', or when we feel or claim that God is obliged to reward us for our 'virtues', we are not likely to experience God's love. Our feeling of entitlement banishes from our heart the basic humility before God and our need for God's mercy.

We can experience God's unconditional love only when we receive it combined with his mercy and compassion. The reality is that all of us need this mercy and compassion just because before God we all are sinners and are truly unworthy. Hence casting out our feeling of entitlement, we must desire for the infinite mercy and compassion of God. The tax collectors and the prostitutes desire and pray first for these from God, and so they are given 'a privileged entry' because of the awareness of their unworthiness! The experience of being forgiven makes them immensely grateful to, and totally dependent on God. In the case of the 'virtuous', pride and feeling of self-worth prevent them from experiencing God's mercy and consequently God's love. Decide where we want to be!

Fr. George

