



Homily for 7/18/2021

8th Sun. after Pentecost
Job, Judas and Peter

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Job, Judas and Peter – three figures speak to me this Sunday.

The Book of Job is probably the most challenging of scriptures in the Old Testament. It is the story of an upright man, in a foreign land, whom God allows to be afflicted by Satan. Through it all, Job stays faithful to God even though he expressed his sorrow at his condition. It is alright to express one's suffering. We rightly cry and grieve at a loss or a setback. But to Job is also attributed the famous statement of faith that should ring in our ears throughout the ages, **"The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!"** (Job 1:21) The rest of the book is a series of speeches and rebuttals between Job and his friends. They came to convince Job that he must have been in the wrong and that maybe he wasn't as upright as he claimed, and that this was the reason for his affliction. Job maintains his innocence through it all, but in the end, he falls into the sin of suggesting God might be in the wrong – the epitome of the deadly sin of pride! After a rebuke by the young man Elihu for daring to suggest this, God Himself chimes in with His answer to Job's questioning.

"Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm and said: Who is this who darkens counsel with words of ignorance? Gird up your loins now, like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its size? Surely you know? Who stretched out the measuring line for it? Into what were its pedestals sunk, and who laid its cornerstone, While the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb, When I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, And said: Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves stop? Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place... Have you entered into the sources of the sea, or walked about on the bottom of the deep?"

Then God delivers a stinging rebuke:

*"Gird up your loins now, like a man. I will question you, and you tell me the answers! Would you refuse to acknowledge my right? Would you condemn **me** that **you** may be justified? Have you an arm like that of God, or can you thunder with a voice like his? Adorn yourself with grandeur and majesty, and clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Let loose the fury of your wrath; look at everyone who is proud and bring them down. Look at everyone who is proud, and humble them."*

Job was humbled by this rebuke, and he replied with repentance:

"Then Job answered the LORD and said:

'I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered... Therefore, I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes.' "

After Job and his friends offered sacrifice to the Lord, the Lord blessed Job more than before because of his humility and repentance. We are left only with the wisdom that there is a God, and I am not He! And that God knows His own mind, and who of us can know the mind of God? God is good, but His ways are hidden from us, and we should not presume to question His providence. They are answers to the problem of suffering, but they are not as satisfying or fulfilling as perhaps we would like.

These are also hard lessons for us to take in today as we digest the latest *Motu Proprio* from Pope Francis, which takes away the provisions of *Summorum Pontificum* that brought about the present celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass here at the Basilica. Many people have come to enjoy and treasure the traditional celebration of the *more ancient use* of the Roman Rite. At the legitimate request of a large number of the faithful here in Chattanooga, this Mass was first offered almost seven years ago. Because those who had come to benefit from it showed stability, growth, faithfulness, and commitment to its continuance, just last summer we began offering the Holy Sacrifice in this manner every Sunday. Therefore, it was with great dismay that we heard that the Holy Father has taken away many



of the freedoms in the use of this form and has restricted its use and constrained the members of the faithful to adhere to strict norms in offering it in the future.

However unsettling this may be, I exhort you, we must read this in the spirit of the Book of Job, lest we fall into the sin of Judas, who thought better than our Lord in His plan of salvation for the Church. It is not without warrant that Pope Francis issued these new norms, even if we think it imprudent. We do well to listen and to guard our hearts against impudence. As guardians of the tradition, Pope Francis has placed the jurisdiction for permitting this form of the Mass into the hands of the local bishop as a successor of the Apostles, who has the divinely appointed office of governance of the particular church in each diocese. Pope Francis, acting in his role as successor of St. Peter, desired to strengthen the faith of his brethren by an appeal to unity. He rightly calls out those who have disrupted the unity of the Church by rejecting the Second Vatican Council and the legitimacy of the New Order of Mass issued by the supreme authority of the Church. He laments, *“ever more plain in the words and attitudes of many is the close connection between the choice of celebrations according to the liturgical books prior to Vatican Council II and the rejection of the Church and her institutions in the name of what is called the ‘true Church.’ One is dealing here with comportment that contradicts communion and nurtures the divisive tendency — ‘I belong to Paul; I belong instead to Apollo; I belong to Cephas; I belong to Christ’ — against which the Apostle Paul so vigorously reacted.”*

Woe to us if we have held these words and attitudes, for which we may be rightly rebuked. Woe to us if we have been a cause of sectarianism or division in our own Church, pitting fellow believers against each other and condemning our brothers whom we deem to be “less” for their adherence to other legitimate forms of the Mass. We cannot deny that there are some who have done this, even amongst our own. We dare not presume that everyone has pure motives and overlook the plank in our own eyes.

However, my own lament is that, for the sins of a few, many will suffer. I want to acknowledge the many faithful, kind, and generous individuals and families who humbly seek this beautiful ancient form of worship, often at great personal sacrifice. I want to express my closeness to those who have blessed and not cursed those who have persecuted or ridiculed them over the years for their desire to celebrate in this way. I want to accompany, during this troubling time, the many young people and young families, full of life and enthusiasm for the faith, who have found in this form a challenge to deepen their relationship with Christ and to share more in the paschal mystery of His suffering death and resurrection. I am so often edified by the deep faith and true devotion that is consistently found among those who attend this Mass. There is no doubt that this form challenges us to be ardent Catholics, and it has the power to set even the most lukewarm heart ablaze with wonder and awe in the worship of God. God is made present in these rites in so many veiled and mysterious ways, and I have seen people go from mediocrity of faith, bordering on walking away, to great zeal and earnest conversion of life by encountering the mysterious love of God in this ancient form. I have watched as souls bordering on death quickened to life, and life in abundance, by the embrace of the demands of this worship. Those veering towards indifference in the spiritual life have been oriented rightly to divine worship, and it has set them on a path of healing in their hearts and minds. I have witnessed members of this community show the richness of Christian charity to their neighbors and exemplify their baptismal call to announce that Jesus Christ is the Lord not only by their words, but also by their deeds. There is true fruit here and it is palpable. I do not want to see it spoiled. And so, we must be pruned. To you who are the little ones who are experiencing great humiliation in this moment, I ask you to find consolation that those at the margins of society, even the society of the Church, are truly close to the heart of God, even if they don’t seem close to the hearts of those with power here on earth. Not all who are attracted to this more ancient form of the Mass reject the working of the Holy Spirit in the Second Vatican Council. Not all who desire the Traditional Latin Mass do so out of a rejection of the validity of the new Missal. I can honestly and rightly repeat, once again, from this pulpit, as I have done many times before, that I reaffirm and adhere, with religious submission of will and intellect, to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. These can and should be interpreted in the light of the constant tradition of the Catholic Church. I invite you to do the same.



Furthermore, I reaffirm and acknowledge that the new forms of the liturgy issued since the Second Vatican Council are valid, licit and truly bring forth the mysteries of faith that the Church has instituted them for and that they do bear fruit in well-disposed souls who make use of them. I invite you to do the same.

At the same time, I acknowledge that the new rites have not been fully or faithfully celebrated everywhere, and that many abuses exist in the manner in which they are carried out. In this I am joined by our Holy Father himself who in his accompanying letter wrote, *“In common with Benedict XVI, I deplore the fact that ‘in many places the prescriptions of the new Missal are not observed in celebration, but indeed come to be interpreted as an authorization for or even a requirement of creativity, which leads to almost unbearable distortions.’ ”* I hope that we can see that Pope Francis is sympathetic to the legitimate complaints of many who have suffered from liturgical abuse and have sought stability in the traditional expressions of faith. However, we cannot make that the cause of *“a rejection not only of the liturgical reform, but of the Vatican Council II itself, claiming, with unfounded and unsustainable assertions, that it betrayed the Tradition and the ‘true Church.’ ”* Here I must make a strong statement, one that comes from love of the Church. If you are unable to assent to these things, then we must part ways. The inability to conform his will to that of Christ’s was what condemned Judas. Judas thought he was right, and that Jesus was wrong – a fatal error. It led this “called-and-confirmed” Apostle to betray his Lord to the sectarians of his day, who in turn, crucified our God.

This is a moment for us to do a deep examination of conscience. Are we Catholic or are we Protestant? Do we belong to the Universal Church founded by Christ upon the Rock of Peter, or do we protest that authority and separate ourselves in schism or apostasy from the vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter? It is ok to be hurt and to grieve. Peter is not always prudent, as he proved over and over again in the scriptures. But we must not make the mistake of Job or follow the error of Judas. We can apply God’s rebuke of Job to our situation with Peter. As Catholics we adhere to Christ through his chosen successor Peter. We may rightly ask, “were you there when Jesus gave Peter the keys? Were you there when Jesus said, ‘Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers?’ Were you there when Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep?’ ” We have all been confused by the words and actions of Pope Francis. But that does not give us the right to rebellion or sedition within the Church. You may have been wounded by the harsh words of our Holy Father. I have been, too. How will we react? This is the question we must ask ourselves. Will we contribute to the further wounding of the Body of Christ, or will we be healed by humility? I preach to myself as first in need of hearing this message! Do we submit with intellect and will to the teaching authority and governance of the Church established by Christ upon the Rock of St. Peter, or do we cling in pride and a sense of righteousness and purity to another for our salvation? If you are schismatic in mind and heart and think that you will do better in the raging sea of this world by clinging to a make-shift dingy instead of being securely ensconced in the Barque of Peter, I beg of you to reconsider. Repent, like Job, and God, who is merciful, will hear and answer. But if you will not rethink or change your mind after this admonition from your spiritual father - then go! I only have the words of Jesus to Judas for you, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” (John 13: 27)

For those who will remain after this stinging rebuke, I say: We may have been proud and rash as Peter; we may be as innocent as Job; but we could easily become as impudent as Judas, if we aren’t careful with our hearts. Humility is the virtue the Lord wants to teach us now. This is for our salvation. To achieve humility, we must endure humiliation. Will we accept this from the Lord, or will we curse God through cursing his Pope and die, as Job’s wife would have us do? Will we let pride boil over into rage and kill our souls in the process? Or will we accept rebuke, be chastened and so be pruned, and bear fruit into eternal life? I pray that if we accept this chastisement with faith in God, and trust in His Almighty Providence, our last days may be fruitful as Job’s!

May Jesus Christ be praised!
Now and forever!