Dear Friends,

Radical Choices of Spiritual and Material Wellbeing

There is a battle going on in the lives of each of us, a battle going on for the lives of each of us, a battle between good and evil. At the end of that battle in the next life we will either hear Jesus say, “you are mine” or hear Satan say, “you are mine.” Through his cross Jesus has won the battle but it is up to us now to accept his grace and live as those redeemed by Jesus. There are manifestations of grace and manifestations of evil all around us, but we can take the side of Jesus in the battle for our lives by overcoming sin and temptation.

William Barclay a noted Biblical scholar says that the Jewish rabbis had sayings based on the way in which some part of the body can lend themselves to sin. They said that the eye and the heart are two brokers of sin, the two handmaids of sin. And there are instincts in man and certain parts of man’s physical constitution which minister to sin. We do not have to live ‘paranoid lives’ but apply Biblical wisdom to daily living and embrace wholeness and holiness.

Our hands become instruments of sin according to what we touch and how we touch, in lust or greed or violence. Our feet are used for sin according to the places we have them take us. Our eyes become doorways for sins according to what we choose to look at or refuse to look at. However, it is important to understand that, in these passages about “plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand,” Jesus is not speaking literally. Jesus is using a figure of speech here, one very common in the Semitic world of first century Palestine — hyperbole, that is exaggeration – to make a special point. We have more sins than we have bodily parts. Besides, even if all offending parts were removed, our hearts and minds — the source of all sins, as Jesus points out elsewhere — would still be intact. Hence, these sayings are about our attitudes, dispositions, and inclinations. Jesus is inviting us to integrate our bodies into our following of Christ, so that our hands become instruments of compassion, healing and comfort, our feet help us to bring the Gospel to the world, and our eyes learn to see, and our mouth to speak the Truth, Goodness and Beauty all around us.

Jesus is asking us to reflect on our lives to see if anything is leading us in the wrong direction and if so to take steps to remedy it. Perhaps for some people alcohol is an occasion of sin because it leads on to committing sin. Many years ago, Paul Achtemeier suggested some modern parallels to the radical actions proposed by Jesus back in his time. “If your TV causes you to sin turn it off! If your computer causes you to sin disconnect it! If your magazine subscription causes you to sin, cancel it! If your job position or power causes you to sin, resign! If your bank account causes you to sin, give it away.” In other words, absolutely nothing is worth jeopardizing your eternal life with Jesus Christ! Jesus is setting before all disciples the one supreme goal in life that is worth any sacrifice. That goal is everlasting union with God Himself beginning here, with our fidelity to following His will for our lives. God alone leads us to everlasting peace and happiness. Apart from avoiding occasions of sin we can also strengthen ourselves against evil in many ways. We can pray to overcome evil. The greatest prayer is the Mass. Many spiritual masters encourage us to move from ‘resisting temptations’ to ‘practicing virtue.’ Holy Mass and other spiritual devotions must be seen in this rule of life as Jesus told us, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and all the rest will be added to you.”

Be blessed, Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.

September 26, 2021

26th SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME

“Giving up some gaming time is not going to hurt you ... but it will help you to find real happiness ... by loving other people and Me.”
GOSPEL MEDITATION
ENCOURAGE DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

What are the little ones? They are the poor, the marginalized, the women and men at the well, the Zacchaeus’ looking for Jesus from a tree, those mired in sin, the blind who want to see, and the lame who want to walk. They are the lepers and the different ones who have been told that they are unclean, and the ones who suffer from abuse and grave injustices and oppression. They are children who want nothing more than to be loved and enjoy celebrating their innocence. These are all the little ones and they are all vulnerable. Life already brings them burdens, we don’t need to add to them.

St. Oscar Romero said, “When the church hears the cry of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises.” Why are so many people still so gravely hurting? We have the resources and the means to make things better. We choose not to. There are still those things called greed, pride, lust, apathy, jealousy, gluttony, and anger that prevent us from seeing each other and people to be loved and not objects to be used. Is this how God intended things to be?

God loves what is good and upright. It doesn’t matter who did it or where it came from. In God’s eyes, the end result is always faith, hope, and love. Those will always unite a person with God. We fill our lives with many things that are not good either for ourselves or for others. All of us have to work to discover what it is, exactly, that leads to the world’s brokenness. There are people, systems, and ideologies in place that foster oppression and injustice rather than equity and fairness. Sadly, our complacency can be the greatest evil. Turning a blind eye, ignoring the truth, and believing that we are helpless to fix so great a problem, does little to move us closer to the kingdom of God. As members of the Body of Christ, we cannot condone anything that keeps people in misery.

As it is said, charity begins at home. Perhaps a good place to start is with our own households and making sure their foundations are properly laid.

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.” - Mk 9:38-39

The first reading, Numbers 11:25-29

The Book of Numbers was written down after the Exile, in the 6th century BC, by Jewish priests who were hoping to put the broken nation back together and to keep it faithful to God. Chapter 11 has two stories of God’s responses to the continuing complaints of the wandering Israelites. First, they had lamented the absence of meat from their diet, comparing the manna unfavorably to the variety of foods they had eaten while enslaved in Egypt. Moses appealed to God, saying that he was unable to manage the people alone. God heard his plea and told him to select seventy elders — experienced men from among the tribes — whom God would appoint as leaders of the people under Moses and assemble them in the Tent of Meeting. Moses did so, and their God bestowed on them part of the Spirit He had given Moses. At once, they began to prophesy—a sign to the people that God had appointed them as His representatives. But Joshua, a close follower and aide of Moses who was jealous for Moses’ reputation, complained about two men named Eldad and Medad. Though both had been on Moses’ list of 70, neither had attended the Spirit-giving ordination ceremony in the Tent of Meeting, yet both were prophesying. Moses asked Joshua, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!” and reminded Joshua gently that God is free to choose anyone He pleases as His prophet. Moses promptly corrected Joshua for showing the tendency toward institutionalizing the power and presence of God.

Through Baptism, all of us are made God’s ministers and God’s prophets. We are filled with God’s Spirit and empowered to interpret God’s vision and message to the people around us, and we are not to grow jealous of those serving the community in positions of greater authority or working for the community in different venues.

The second reading, James 5:1-6

The passage from James illustrates how the rich give scandal by their unjust treatment of laborers and their gross violation of the principles of social justice. Today’s passage is a straightforward moral condemnation and a strong denunciation of the unscrupulous rich who enrich themselves by treating others unfairly and spend their riches in self-indulgence. Withholding a day-laborer’s wage was a terrible act of injustice, tantamount to murder in the agricultural economy of the ancient Middle East. James is merciless in his condemnation of ill-gotten wealth. There’s hardly a more emphatic passage in the New Testament. The rich have the greater temptation than others to let their earthly riches surpass their need for the incredible riches in Christ. The rich have more of a tendency to perceive that they have no need for God but can depend on the security of their wealth. James is warning them that they need to not be overly concerned about their riches in light of what is about to happen to them in the life to come.

GOSPEL INSIGHTS

Learn the Christian virtue of tolerance: Christian tolerance is brotherly love; it asks that we bear with the weaknesses of others, without condoning the evil they do. Intolerance is a sign of a weak Faith. Intolerance is also ineffective. It does nothing but damage to the cause it seeks to defend. When we attack a heretic, we don’t change his mind, for the most part. We just give him an audience. To ban a book, is, almost surely, to make it a best seller. Condemning a sinner immediately draws people to defend him. An intolerant attitude will alienate, rather than attract, sinners. Only genuine agape love can overcome hatred. The Church should display this patient love to a hate-filled world. The Church is expected to present Christ to the world. How can the Church present Christ when it is arrogant or intolerant rather than loving others as Christ loves us? We cannot exalt love by encouraging hate. Hence, let us try both to learn and to practice the virtue of Christian brotherly love in our interfaith and ecumenical endeavors by: a) remaining true to our conscience and beliefs, b) respecting the differences we encounter, c) working together on projects of common interest, d) affirming what is good in the other person’s position, even when we disagree on certain things, and e) allowing the light of Christ to shine through our loving words and deeds.

A millstone for the scandal-giver: Jesus’ warns against scandal-givers: those who cause the “little ones” to sin. The Greek word for “little ones” is micron, meaning the smallest or the least. It can mean children, those who are new to the Faith, or those who are weak in Faith. Jesus is pointing out that the scandalous behavior of older believers can be an obstacle to those whose Faith is just beginning to develop. Etymologically, the word scandal comes from the Greek skandalon, which was a trap-stick or bent sapling used for a snare. Here ‘to give scandal’ means to behave in such a way that you encourage others to sin.

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LIVING THE WAY GOD WANTS US TO LIVE

The truth of God’s omnipotence and the fact that God is bigger than every human assumption and measure and proposal must always be present in our minds. That is the only way to truly understand God and accept His will. Made in the image and likeness of God, we will always have the imprint of immortality and the depth of being in us. But we must never be blinded by the special human intelligence and power. There is a tendency in the human person to limit God also within his/her confines. This is a struggle that has always been. The scriptures are very frank in pointing that to us. This message comes across to us in our readings for this weekend. Irrespective of our presuppositions, we must always leave the greatest space for God. We must always realize that our plans are myopic and based on the limited nature of our understanding. It is God alone whose knowledge is infinite. God is never conditioned to how we think or how we wish things to be! This has always affected our understanding of God and has created conflicts between us and the logic of Divine Operation. We truly understand God when we realize that God cannot be completely understood; there is always something mysterious about God and in this mystery lays the absoluteness of God. The hard truth is that sometimes, in the sincere effort to protect the faith and our values, we can become obstacles to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the workings of God. In as much as the protection of our faith and values is a working principle and a rule, we must realize that God cannot be bottled within the limitations of understanding and standards. Our liturgy and prayers are to be understood as avenues whereby the Divine interacts with us to bring about what is best for us.

The logic of Divine Operation is always beyond human comprehension. This calls for humility on all of us to realize in concrete terms that God knows beyond us, individually and collectively, and He sees infinitely farther than we can ever imagine. In every human rule and working principle, there must be the greatest space for God’s exercise of His absolute freedom. One who does not understand this style of Divine Operation will surely misuse his or her God-given opportunities and use them as means of inflicting pain and suffering on others and as weapons of exploitation and subjugation. Such a person does not understand that the gifts of God were never given to him or her to be above others, but rather to be at the service of others.

In God we come to know both transcendence and imminence—so great yet so near, so powerful yet so accessible. To this must be added what the Jewish rabbi’s called the ‘greatest quality of God’ “All Merciful One”. Once we are able to perceive that God in His infinite richness is closest to the human being so that we can relate to Him as Jesus taught, as our Father “Abba”, then we can let loose the reins of kindness and generosity in our lives. We will always become what or whom we love. So the disciple becomes like the Master. In the disciple the Master continues to live and teach. So we all are faced with the choice of embracing this ‘way of God’ or rejecting it. This repeated option of God in our daily living transforms us into other Christs—children of the Father.

RESOURCES USED WITH PERMISSION FROM FR TONY HOMILIES, SUNDAY WEBSITE–ST LOUIS UNIVERSITY, LPI, SERMON CENTRAL

1. What are your special gifts? How do you use them in service of others?
2. How do you rate yourself as a social person? Explain
3. What choices did you make recently to live as God wants you to? Are people happy around you?