

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today's readings offer us an opportunity to reflect on the power of reconciliation and the grace that comes from a conversion of heart. In the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, we hear the people of Israel grumbling at the struggles they are facing. They lament, "The Lord's way is not fair!" How often have we, when faced with challenges and hardships - especially those the result of a perceived unfairness or injustice - felt that God, or life itself, is not fair? I know I have felt this way at times and I am sure I am not alone. Ezekiel posits a very important challenge that comes with an examination of conscience: is it God's way that is unfair, or is it more realistically the case that as human beings are simply unvirtuous in our behavior? In light of this truth, however, is the inestimable love and mercy of God who always welcomes us back when we turn from iniquity to a conversion of heart. "...if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life." Does not the Incarnation, the suffering and death, but ultimately the Resurrection of Jesus Christ point us to this truth, this fundamental aspect of our faith?

Paul's discourse to the Philippians is such a powerful statement on the need for unity of mind and heart as a Christian community. I often reflect on these words in my prayer and they help remind me that the ministry to which God has called me is not for me alone but is deeply embedded in a relationship with the Body of Christ. "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing."

The one thing we think about is the desire of Jesus Christ that we all be one, united in Baptism and sharers in the divine life which God seeks for us. When we strive to live out this truth, it is much easier to respect disagreements, to place others before ourselves and thus mitigate the scourge of selfishness and vanity, to give freely of ourselves without calculating the cost to us. We know that the disciples themselves faced these very real temptations and Jesus rebuked them to not give into these temptations, the result of which is disunity, rancor, and a diminution of our Christian call to love and serve one another.

Matthew's Gospel speaks of Jesus asking the chief priests and elders of the people their opinion on two sons who are asked by their father to labor in the vineyard. The sons give two very different responses. The first son is immediately disobedient and says he will not go out into the vineyard. Yet, after a time he has a conversion, a change of heart, and does as his father asks. The second son, however, tells his father he will go to work but in fact willfully does not. Jesus asks which of the sons did his father's will. Naturally, they reply the first son did as he was asked. Jesus thus likens the first son to the tax collectors and prostitutes. When they heard the news of redemption and righteousness, they reformed their lives and thus were subject to citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus likens the scribes and elders to the second son, who even when he heard the invitation to serve his father, rejected it and ignored him.

There is great hope for us in the example of the first son in this story. Let us not be afraid to do the righteous things which will lead us to a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.. We can pray for the desire of this grace, which is the greatest treasure of all!

--Fr. Tom