

Ordinary Time 26 - B - 2

Nm 11:25-29; Jas 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

REFLECTION ON THE MASS:

Beginning this week, Fr. Ramos and I will be cutting down our homilies a little bit to include a short reflection on a part of the Mass. There are also books available at the back of the church about the Mass you can take, and tomorrow evening we have the first of two special presentations we will have before the summer that go into more depth. Also check out the videos on the Mass on the website.

Today we reflect on what the Mass is. The Mass is not just a ritual, or a meeting of a club, it is a continuation of the Old Testament worship set up by God - which was made new by Jesus Christ. In the Mass we come together as Christians have since the first century, we unite as a community, we allow God to feed us, we engage in our priestly ministry as part of Jesus' body, we worship the God who is deserving of praise, and we allow God to feed us both in the Word and in the Eucharist. It is the main way we "keep Holy the Sabbath" as the Lord commanded, it is how we unite more closely to our God in a powerful way, and it is how we praise God for God's great love. Like commitment to work and family, it is a duty. Through our joining Jesus' sacrifice we offer ourselves and our lives - an offering that becomes blessings for the world that we pray for - and we enter into an encounter with Jesus that is only possible during Mass.

We will be looking over the next few months in these reflections at various parts of the Mass. If the Mass could hold more meaning for you, then please listen, please focus, please see what a great thing can be gained from one hour per week of giving God only a small bit back for all God has given to us. This is the source of our Christian life and the high point as well.

HOMILY:

In today's Gospel Jesus makes what seems to be a radical statement: *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.* He also talks about cutting off our feet, and plucking our eyes. What is he trying to say? Well there are three important things we can take from these statements:

First, that there is such a thing as a hell. Now that is not so fashionable to say, and we all know that it is much more popular to speak about each person who dies as being in heaven, or to believe that we know who is in heaven because they have been what we define as a "good person," but in many places in the scriptures this is not what Jesus says. His message is more challenging. He many times affirms the possibilities of going to hell - that state in the next life where we are separated from God. As spiritual beings in the next life the only thing that satisfies us is connection with God (in heaven there is no food, or parties, or other earthly pleasures that we imagine) - there is God who fills even need perfectly and for eternity. To not have this, and always be incomplete and wanting would be ... well ... hell.

The second thing that these statements show is that it is possible for us to lose the gift of eternal life and separate ourselves from God. No we can't earn our way into heaven by a good life - the free gift of heaven was won for us by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we will reenter in this Mass. What we can do is surrender that gift by clinging so hard to the earthly, and to the sinful, that we let go of God. God does not force us into actions, God gives us free will, even the will to let go of heaven if we so choose - God does not force us into heaven, and makes it clear that those who reject our Lord can lose this gift. God gives us a great gift and is asking you just to stay by his side so you can receive it. It would be crazy to think that you could walk away from that position of closeness and still expect to get the gift - it's actually the closeness that allows us to receive it. Pulling from God and expecting heaven is like saying "I want to jump into that pool and still stay dry," and when you get wet, think you have been gipped. Sin draws us away from God and dependence on God, it actually causes us to sell our soul out of love of things, to break our baptismal commitment to the Lord, to have our hearts desire the temporary things of earth over the eternal things of God. Our hearts drift farther from God and we cease to love God and voluntarily break the bond we were given in Baptism - the bond with the Body of the risen and ascended Jesus that allows us to enter heaven. That is how we mortal creatures get to heaven, as part of the Body of Christ - we cannot sever that bond and make it.

The third thing Jesus tells us in this passage is that although we don't have the power to get ourselves into heaven, we do have the power (with his help) to separate ourselves from the sin in our lives that breaks our bond to him. Jesus doesn't want us to wound ourselves, He wants us to reach "life," that eternal unity with him in Heaven. He essentially tells us to get rid of anything that causes us to sin even if it seems as important as your own hand - or your foot, or your eye - and this is tough! We must turn away from sin in our life, get rid of those things that indulge our lusts and greed, trust in God by not hoarding material things and money, devote our bodies to God's service not to sexual lust, separate from those people that draw us to sin ... break from the patterns that bring us down. It takes courage to cut these things off, then to go to confession to allow Jesus to graft you back onto the Body, and then to approach Jesus in the Eucharist and ask to be transformed. We sometimes hesitate to remove the sin from in our lives thinking: "I'll do it later." Jesus says do it now, even if it is difficult, even if it seems as radical as cutting off a part of your body. What we lose by getting rid of these things is nothing compared to what we gain by keeping our hands open to receive the gift of eternal life from God.