

Homily For Tuesday of the 11th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - June 14, 2022

1 Kings 21:17-29 "Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring the disaster in his days."

Psalm 51:1-14 "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

Matt. 5:43-48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

You Must Be Perfect

Introduction

After mass on Trinity Sunday, a parishioner told the pastor: The Trinity is a mystery and I still don't understand it. The priest thought that comment was good because, if he had somehow in his homily made the great mystery of Father, Son and Spirit understandable, it would mean he had oversimplified God's self revelation. He only wanted people to think more, not imagine that they had grasped the fullness of God. Then, later, another parishioner gushed over his homily: Thank you Father. What a great explanation. I now totally understand the Trinity.

So that might be our experience. Sometimes we think we have understood what God wants us to know about him and sometimes we are just baffled. I think that today's readings may make us both more in love with God but, at the same time, more confused. How can our God possibly extend mercy to such a wickedly idolatrous king, who carries out a horrible crime against one of his subjects, to satisfy his own selfish interest? And then, again, how can Jesus say that his disciples must be as perfect as God is, having mercy even on our enemies. God was merciful to his enemy, King Ahab. Must we really do the same for the King Ahabs in our own life?

1 Kings

Elijah told Ahab that he had sold himself to do what is evil. He belonged to someone else and it was not the God of Israel. This is the classic selling of one's immortal soul to the devil for a passing thing of the world. That king of Israel had

long been turning away from the one true God to the gods of the world, the worst of idolatry, so it's not surprising that there would be no moral code left for him to which he should adhere. It wasn't just that he had killed. That was certainly bad enough. It was that he had betrayed justice itself. Justice was giving to another what they are owed. It was behind every command that God had given to Israel. It was the foundation of the entire law. Loss of justice was the reason they were taken into exile.

I asked myself right away upon reading this passage: Why would a man who had turned away from God humble himself? Is he just putting on a show upon hearing the punishment he is to receive? Is he really repentant? It seems so. You and I may condemn that man as beyond redemption. On the other hand, haven't we come to trust that God knows what is truly in the heart. Jesus, the Son of God, always knows what's in the hearts of those he meets, the good and bad alike. That means he always knows what is in our hearts.

God does hear Ahab's prayer. What is always amazing about God is that he is both merciful and just at the same time. Ahab receives mercy but he must endure the consequences of his actions. There are always consequences to what we do and say and think. There is no avoiding accountability for our behaviour. However, it is not a legalistic punishment system. Humility and repentance influence the consequences. That's mercy. Ahab will not suffer the terrible death he deserves. However, he will live in the knowledge that there will be no more kings in his line. His house be destroyed and his ongoing place in history wiped out. His son will suffer what he deserves.

Psalm

The psalm today is the most famous prayer of repentance. Another king, David, has also committed a great crime against justice, not too much different than Ahab's. We are reading King David's prayer of confession. We see his true heart. He has always been a true worshipper, a man after God's own heart. He had a relationship with God to which he could return. "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. O wash me from my sins and cleanse me from my iniquities." He also received consequences, but not the loss of his

house, the House of David, by which you and I have been redeemed from human sinfulness, through the death and resurrection of David's descendent, Jesus the Christ.

Matthew

Jesus says love your enemies. He asks us to be good towards those who are not good to us. The only way we can do that is to pray for them. If we do that daily, God will give us the grace to do that. That is the path to his mercy that Jesus offers us. This kind of love is beyond the natural capacity of our fallen human nature. That's why we must call on the supernatural graces to walk this path of perfection. The gift of the Spirit received through faith and the sacraments makes this path possible. It's a heavenly way of life to which Jesus summons us. That's why we have the saints. None of them were perfect in this life, but they showed us that it is possible to seek perfection.

In the Old Testament, Israel was to imitate God's holiness. This was often interpreted as a call to separate oneself from all that is unholy. Jesus, however, calls his disciples to imitate God by being perfect in love. I like the way Pope Benedict puts it: "Why does Jesus ask us to love precisely our enemies, that is, a love which exceeds human capacities? Because it takes into account that in the world there is too much violence, too much injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with more love."

Conclusion/Call to Action

Today our challenge is to ask God to help us want to pray for those who do evil, even if it is towards us. It is certainly very easy to love those who love you. But our Lord is urging us to love those we know who may never return our affection, or our smiles, or that favor. On the Cross, Christ forgave those who crucified him.

At the same time, we are called to be aware of the wickedness that seeks to take over our own hearts. When we repent, God has mercy on us. Perhaps if we see it that way, it is a kind of perfection worth imitating, a path of perfection worth following, even when we don't do it perfectly and even when we don't understand it fully.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Upon a lofty throne, a host of angels adore, singing in unison: Behold him, the name of whose empire is eternal.*

Collect: *Attend to the pleas of your people, O Lord, that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen.*

1 Kings: *The word of the Lord came to Elijah: God down to meet King Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth. Say to him, "Thus says the Lord: Have you killed, and also taken possession? Where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood. You have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. I will bring disaster on you. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin. He acted most abominably, urged on by his wife Jezebel, and going after idols. Ahab tore his clothes and put on sackcloth. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days but in his son's days.*

Psalm: *Have mercy on me, O God. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. My sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.*

Matthew: *Jesus said, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*