

Homily For Tuesday of the 12th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II St Peter's 8:30am Mass - June 25, 2024

2 Kings 19:9-36 "Save us so that all the nations of the earth may know that you are God alone."

Psalm 48:1-10 "God has shown himself a sure defence."

Matthew 7:6,12-14 "The gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life."

Holiness, Gold, and Two Paths

Introduction

Some will still claim that the God of the Old Testament is somehow different than in the New Testament. He used to be harsh, mean and violent, but he sent Jesus to show God as nice. But if we understand the truth, Jesus is NOT nice. He loves. Profoundly. He is merciful. But he is not nice. Nice is what I am when I want people to like me. That's the wide path. The narrow path is something different. The Sermon on the Mount comes to an end with three points: What is holiness, the 'golden rule', and the two paths. None of them present God as nice.

Matthew

Holiness means set aside for covenant relationship. God is holy. Things that are holy are consecrated for worship of the God who is holy. People are holy when we allow that covenant relationship to transform us into what he has made us for. Everything that is not holy is called profane. That does not mean it is evil. It just means that it has not been dedicated to God. Our job in the world, our primary activity, is to set aside all we do and all we are and all we have for God. The sacred (or holy) and the profane are two realities. In the Our Father, we pray first that God's name may be hallowed, or 'holy'. Profanity is taking the holy name of God and using it for an unholy purpose. In the Eucharist, ordinary bread and wine, offered to God, become holy.

Jesus uses the image of dogs and pigs as profane. In the ancient middle east, dogs were scavengers, not pets. Pigs were not just physically unclean but, for the Jews, ritually unclean as well. Jesus says not to cast pearls before swine. Practically, I

guess, that just means don't throw your nice jewelry in front of a pig who is following you. What this does mean is that we are not to take what is good and holy and mix it with what is profane. Holiness means set apart. We are to set ourselves apart from unholy things.

The good news of the kingdom is something holy and is to be shared with the profane world around us. However, that Good News is so sacred and so precious that it must not be shared where it will be mocked. God can't really be offended. He is above that. However, God in us can be offended if we let it be so. For example, the cross is a reminder of how the world made Jesus Christ something to be mocked, to be thrown down in front of pigs. But in the resurrection, Jesus was purified of the stain of unholiness that was gouged into his flesh by the world.

If people show open disdain for God's holiness, then it is wise to withdraw and to take the good news elsewhere. Saint Francis of Assisi says that "When the priest offers Jesus on the altar, all people should bow their knees and surrender to the Lord, the living and true God, praise, glory and devotion." Pope Benedict XVI reminds the modern world that, in the liturgy, we are in the sight and presence of the holy God."

After holiness, we have the golden rule. It is similar to other statements in the Old Testament and other religions. Do to others what you would like them to do to you. In the past it was often about getting back in kind what you do. That's a profane desire. Now, Jesus offers this command as a means of taking ordinary human aspirations and making them holy, as a sacrificial offering to God, as the guiding principle for how disciples are to live. It's the whole law and the prophets, Jesus says. Later he will frame it as the two great commandments: Love God. Love your neighbour.

Finally, we have the dramatic conclusion to the sermon. There are two roads. One leads to heaven. It is difficult and is even hard to find. People think if you follow God, the road will be easy. But if life is easy, you may be on a detour.

The wide and comfortable road has lots of traffic drifting along without a problem. But this road ends with destruction. Jesus sees many being swept along in this direction. He is warning us against the currents of a sinful and selfish world that would carry us away from the kingdom the Lord has prepared for us.

Some think that the Church should conform itself to the world so that we will be more friendly. This has never been the way of the Gospel message. It is good news and promises much, but there is nothing easy about following the Gospel.

2 Kings

King Hezekiah followed the narrow way, not the crowds. Many nations had fallen to the Assyrian King. Jerusalem was the last city and that King Sennacherib really wanted it. Hezekiah, the greatest king after David, did not follow nations who worshipped gold. He followed the Lord. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were lost as they were dispersed by the same Assyrians. They were brutal. Today's passage has Judah being threatened. Hezekiah, the greatest king of Judah after David. He is the son of the worst king ever, Ahaz. He restores true worship. Hezekiah trusted in God first before his impossible task against a huge invading force. We might want to take note of Hezekiah's prayer, which begins with telling God who he is. This is not arrogance but really a reminder to himself of their covenant relationship, of the holiness of God and the love he has for his children.

Call to Conversion

Is the narrow path reserved for a chosen few? Not at all. The message of Christ is that the passage to eternal life is open to all, but it is "narrow" because it is demanding. This way requires commitment, self-denial and the mortification of our selfishness and pride. Look around and notice where 'pride' is being trumpeted. It's easy to be proud. Don't I know it. But the reward of the harder path is so great, there is no comparison of which road is better. Jesus, the holy one of God, is on that road with us. And he loves us enough to walk with us on that hard narrow path. The Sermon on the Mount began with the Beatitudes: Blessed are ... Happy are ... It ends with the happiness that is reserved for those who follow the narrow path.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The Lord became my protector. He brought me out to a place of freedom. He saved me because he delighted in me.*

Collect: *Grant us, O Lord, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule, and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion.*

2 Kings: *The king of Assyria sent messengers to Hezekiah saying: "Do not let your God deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into my hand. You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly." Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and prayed: "O Lord the God of Israel, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes O Lord and see. Hear the words sent to mock the living God. Save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are God alone." Then Isaiah sent to Hezekiah, saying: "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I have heard your prayer. The king of Assyria shall not come into this city. For I will defend it for my own sake and for that of my servant David.' That very night the angel of the Lord struck down one hundred eighty five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. Then King Sennacherib left and went home to Nineveh.*

Psalm: *God upholds his city forever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God. God has shown himself a sure defence. Your name, O God, like your praise, reaches to the ends of the earth.*

Matthew: *Jesus said, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the law and the prophets. Enter through the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."*