

Homily For Tuesday of the 21st Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 27, 2024

(Memorial - St. Monica)

2 Thess 2:1-3,14-17 "Do not be shaken or alarmed as if the day of the Lord is already here."

Psalm 96:10-13 "He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth."

Matthew 23:23-26 "Woe to you hypocrites, blind guides who have neglected justice, mercy and faith. "

Clean the Inside Also

Introduction

Tomorrow is the feast of St. Augustine. Monica precedes him. With her as our model, today is a very good day to pray for children and grandchildren. Monica storms heaven with her prayers, not for hours or days or weeks or months or years, but for decades.

Our dishwasher is getting old. It still cleans some parts of the dishes, but we sometimes have to look at the cups to make sure the inside is clean. Maybe we need to pray a curse over it like Jesus did the Pharisees.

Matthew

Jesus seems to go out of his way to insult and criticize the scribes and Pharisees, whom he calls hypocrites, blind guides and, finally, children of hell. This is not the sweet, gentle Jesus that many would like to make him. So what makes Jesus so angry and why should it matter to us?

These are the second two of what are called the 7 woes, warnings about the judgement to befall those who lead people astray. It's the strongest language Jesus uses to this point in Matthew's Gospel. We know that a hypocrite is someone whose actions are not consistent with his words. The most damning thing for them is, they know better, or they SHOULD know better. Come on back.

When Jesus accuses the Pharisees of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel, he is explaining that there are little things and big things. Don't do the little things, the little traditions, and leave out the big things, the big Tradition. Gnats and

camels are both considered unclean for eating. So they would make sure the little insects were strained out of the wine so as not to accidentally eat them. But Jesus uses this great image of swallowing a camel instead to say that you mustn't do that little thing but forget about being just and merciful, about true faith in God. Stop pretending to be faithful, like cleaning the outside of the cup that everyone can see, and do the bigger things. Clean the inside where your heart is.

The scribes and Pharisees are very careful to offer exactly a tenth of their annual harvest to the Lord, even the tiniest herbs used for seasoning food. But they put justice and mercy, which is faithfulness of the heart, equal to or even lower than those prescriptions. In so doing, they make a mockery of God himself, who is the source of those qualities.

We have heard Jesus using the image of a camel being forced through the eye of a needle. Now his image is of a camel being swallowed. Poor camels. It's not their fault that they were considered the largest of the ritually unclean animals, and **not** to be eaten. Insects were also ritually unclean, so wine or water would sometimes be passed through a filter cloth so as not to accidentally eat one. Jesus challenges their focus on filtering out the tiniest of insects but swallowing the largest of unclean animals. That's how big is their hypocrisy. They take care of tiny details of the law but blatantly disregard the whole reason for the law, which is to reflect God 's qualities of justice and mercy and peace.

St. Monica

Story about my mother lamenting to her pastor that only one of five sons was attending mass. The priest said: "I hope it's the deacon."

St. Monica (322-387 A.D.) was raised in a Christian home in Tagaste, North Africa. She had many struggles throughout her life. Still she fervently prayed for those around her. Her eldest son, Augustine, caused her the most pain. Through her persistence in prayer and good example, her husband was converted shortly before his death. Monica then followed her son to Milan, where she asked the St. Ambrose, to help her. Ambrose's response was: "The child of those tears shall never perish."

We love St. Monica because she 'unlocked' the kingdom of heaven for her family members, with great patience and perseverance. And when she accomplished that for which she believed God had set her the task, there was nothing left to do, and she was ready to go. Her job was to pray and live for the conversion of first one family member and then another. When that was done, she was ready for heaven.

In one of St. Augustine's many beautiful prayers, he thanks God for his mother: "And Thou sent Thine hand from above, and drew my soul out of that profound darkness, my mother, Thy faithful one, weeping to Thee for me, more than mothers weep the bodily deaths of their children. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and Thou heard her, O Lord; Thou heard her, and despised not her tears, when streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed; yea Thou heard her."

Monica was immersed in a pagan culture, but managed to surround herself with the spirit of love, gentleness, tenderness, those things Jesus accused the Pharisees of ignoring. We also are immersed in an increasingly pagan culture. Therefore, Monica's path could also be our path. Perhaps today, rather than be discouraged, we could see a new path that we hadn't considered. What if we were to choose one person, shown to us by the Holy Spirit, to dedicate our spiritual attention to.

Call To Conversion

Story of the young girl who, after her first confession declared: "I feel so clean." Today, let us not be anxious or afraid. Let us stand firm and not be shaken. But let us begin and continue to pray, knowing that no prayer is wasted. This is the heart of faith, the faith of the cup that is clean inside. Let us turn to St. Monica, who knew how to focus on only the most important things.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The woman who fears the Lord will herself be praised. Her children have called her most blessed, her husband has sung her praises.*

Collect: *O God, who console the sorrowful and who mercifully accepted the motherly tears of Saint Monica for the conversion of her son Augustine, grant us, through the intercession of them both, that we may bitterly regret our sins and find the grace of your pardon.*

2 Thess 2: *We beg you not to be shaken or alarmed as though the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you. God called you through our proclamation of the good news ... Hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father ... comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good word and word.*

Psalm 96: *He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.*

Matthew 23: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected justice mercy and faith ... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you ... for you clean the outside of the cup, but inside it is full of greed and self indulgence. First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.*