

Homily for 23rd Week of Ordinary Time
Tuesday September 6, 2016
Evening Mass
1 Corinthians 6:1–11
Psalm 149:1b–6a, 9b
Luke 6:12–19

Today's readings highlight for us the story of two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of this world that is obvious to all and is marked by self-centred and self-serving values. There is the Kingdom of Heaven that is not obvious to all and is marked by Christ-centred and other-serving values. The way of Jesus is to call us from allegiance to the kingdom of this world to allegiance to the kingdom of heaven. While we continue to live in the world we are learning to live according to the values of the world that is yet to come. Jesus wants us to understand that the Kingdom of heaven that still awaits us in the future is to increasingly inform how we live in the present world, the kingdom that is passing away.

Here is what is so amazing about how Jesus calls. He takes people who are fully entrenched in the affairs of this world and asks them to stop following the king of this world – who Paul in Ephesians refers to as ‘the ruler of the air’ (aka, the Devil) and start following the king of the world that is to come, the Lord Jesus. Think of five of the twelve mentioned in today's Gospel. Matthew, who had been a tax collector, a man whom the other apostles would have been so suspicious of, because not only was he in the pay of Rome, but was more than likely as crooked as a switchback to a mountain summit. Then there was Simon the Zealot, a man who would have hated those like Matthew. He had devoted his life to overthrowing the likes of Matthew – even to the point of murdering them, and would also have worked as a revolutionary in the overthrow of Rome. Then there is Judas Iscariot. One who even after three years could not accept what Jesus was saying about two kingdoms and in the end chose to follow the king of this world in a self-centred and self-serving life ending in suicide. Then there were the brothers James and John, nicknamed by Jesus “the Son's of Thunder”. No doubt there were times when tempers were raging and life amongst that church of 13 was very turbulent.

It is these very men that Jesus called to be apostles. Now what does the word apostle mean? It is one who is sent. One sent out into the kingdoms of this world to announce another king and another kingdom. It was this very thing that an apostle not listed among the Twelve, the one who referred to himself as “untimely born”, St. Paul, did repeatedly. He was sent by Jesus to announce to the Churches he established this other kingdom. Nowhere did he have more difficulty doing this than in Corinth. For here were people who though they were beginning to follow Jesus were living their lives more in keeping with the kingdom of this world than with the values of the kingdom of heaven. This was evidenced by the wealthy taking the less well-heeled fellow Christians to small claims court and suing them. It was characterized by a Church that as

we read yesterday condoned a man sleeping with his step-mother. It was characterized by the endorsing of other vices such as fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites,¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers and robbers continuing in these practices while claiming to be Christians.

But as Paul says, continuing to live as if the kingdom of heaven does not inform the shaping of character and virtue is to deny the existence of that other kingdom and its king. Such people will not inherit heaven because they are living in the present as if heaven does not matter.

For each one of us we may struggle with various vices in our lives, some of which like those listed here are mortal sins thus separating us from God.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God most fully manifests his almighty power by showing mercy as we prayed in today's collect. He understands the struggle we all face in giving primary allegiance to Jesus' kingdom. Through honesty about sin, and taking it seriously through Confession and growing in virtue we can increasingly live attached to the Kingdom of heaven and detached from the kingdom of earth.

Our passage ends with Paul clearly differentiating between these two kingdoms:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.¹

Once prisoners in sin the Corinthians have been redeemed and renewed by the washing of Baptism. The point is that God's grace and forgiveness can rescue even the worst sinners from their deadly habits. **washed ... sanctified ... justified:** Three effects of Baptism, through which sinners are cleansed of guilt (Acts 22:16), made holy (Rom 6:22), and adopted as heirs of eternal life (Tit 3:5–7).

When we see that daily there is the struggle between these two kingdoms we will depend on the mercy of God to help day by day say yes to Jesus and rely on his abundant grace to grow in virtue and holiness.

¹ *The Holy Bible*. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, 1 Co 6:11). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.