

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We continue our journey with Jesus and his disciples on the last stretch of their journey to Jerusalem. Jesus has been telling his disciples that the cross, suffering, and death await all disciples who follow him just as it awaits him in Jerusalem. He advised them to be patient and tolerant with imperfections, failures, mistakes and shortfalls and be open to mutual, brotherly, sisterly and friendly corrections, forgive others as God has forgiven and be generous just as God is generous in all matters, including forgiveness.

Today, we celebrate the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in ordinary time of the year. Our Scripture readings of today call us to transform our negative responses to God into positive ones – to change our “no” to God into a decided “yes” to God, to change our desire for “self-fulfillment” into “self-emptying” service to our brothers and sisters and remain faithful to the choices we make. Our Scripture readings of today remind us that a lifetime of sin can be changed and transformed into a life of virtue just as a lifetime of virtue can be changed into a life of sin.

The Prophet Ezekiel tells us that a lifetime of saying “no” to God, can be changed into a life of saying “yes” to God (first reading). The Psalmist prays and seeks to know God’s way and truth (Responsorial Psalm). Paul invited the Philippians and he invites us today to change our selfish attitudes and nurture the mentality of Christ, to make the mind and heart of Christ our own. In the Gospel reading of today, we read about a son who said “no” to his father and changed it into an “yes” and another son who said “yes” to his father and changed it into a “no”. The final answer made the difference.

Fine words are never substitutes for fine deeds. It is not difficult to say “yes” to God or recite a creed or make a profession of faith, but to live the Christian life is demanding and challenging and often difficult. We know how narrow and difficult the path forward can be when we face life-altering decisions, when we change our negative responses to positive ones, when we say “yes” to God’s way and “no” to our own.

Jesus was once asked whether only a few would be saved (Luke 13:22-30). Behind this question was the belief that only the Jews would be saved and not the gentiles. Jesus responded by telling them that membership in the Jewish community or any faith community did not guarantee entrance into the kingdom. He called them to make difficult choices and make the difficult journey...the door is narrow, he said. He himself was making his way to Jerusalem to

face rejection and eventual death. We know how narrow the path forward can be when we face life-altering decisions. We often face situations where all our choices must give way to one, single choice. No one else can make that choice for us and no one else would suffer the consequences of that choice. All our choices will come to this narrow “gate” that will define who we are and even define us into the future. We must walk through the narrow gate and enter the kingdom.

From the beginning of scriptures, we read about great men and women being called to make difficult choices and they in turn called their people to make hard choices. Moses and the prophets and finally Jesus offered people choices between life and death; way of the just and way of the wicked; good and bad; way of wisdom and way of foolishness, way of the kingdom and way of the world and so on.

Jesus calls us and challenges us to make difficult choices, make the difficult journey, walk the path of trials, face testing times, enter through the narrow door and be faithful to the choices and commitments we make. The way to the kingdom is not easy, but it is just the right way. We must make difficult choices and be faithful to the choices we make. The choice is ours. Once the choice is made, the question is: is that your final choice? Your final answer to the call? And will you remain faithful to your choice, your final answer to the call? Some of the listeners of Jesus were shocked at the many things that he taught and did. Many of them walked away in protest. So, Jesus asked his disciples whether they too were going to walk away. Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:60-69)

There are many in our history whose lives once characterized by “no” to God was transformed into a decided “yes”, into a final answer “yes.” We have a St. Augustine whose pleasure-seeking life was transformed into a faith-defending life. Thomas Merton, one of the great mystics of our times, moved from “No” to “Yes” to God and God’s way... orphaned at 16, Merton traveled Europe at 18 maintaining a bohemian lifestyle... a vowed communist at 20, a reporter for New York times at 24 and a Trappist monk at 26. His “no” became a decided “Yes” and he remained faithful to his final choice!

Some of you may remember John Newton’s cry for God’s mercy during a storm at sea and his dramatic and radical conversion following his cry. He was a slave trader and a self-proclaimed “wretch who once was lost but then was found,” saved by amazing grace. His “yes” to God is memorialized in “Amazing Grace,” one of the most beloved hymns of all times, found in the hymnals of many Christian denominations. The author of this hymn was John Newton.

I encourage you to take a few moments each day of this week to be still and reflect on how your day has been and to pray for God’s grace to say “yes” to God and remain faithful to your “yes”. Pray for those who are struggling to say “yes” to God and God’s way and remain faithful.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Twenty-sixth Sunday In Ordinary Time

October 1, 2023

**O Lord, do not let us turn into “broken cisterns” that can hold no water,
do not let us be so blinded by the enjoyment of the good things of earth
that our hearts become insensible to the cry of the poor, of the sick, of orphaned children
and of those innumerable brothers and sisters of ours who lack the necessary minimum
to eat, to clothe their nakedness, and to gather their family together in one roof.
(Pope John XXIII)**

Collect

O God, who manifest your almighty power
above all by pardoning and showing mercy,
bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us
and make those hastening to attain your promises
heirs to the treasures of heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**Our God is abundant in love and steadfast in mercy. He saves us,
not because we trust in a symbol, but because we trust in a Savior.
(Max Lucado)**

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Ezekiel tells his people that even for sinners who said “no” to God, a new beginning is possible because the future of a human being is not predetermined by his/her past. The individual is not a slave of his past.... the past cannot determine the future...the present is an opportunity for conversion and transformation.

Now is the moment of Grace...this moment offers new opportunities for new choices and decisions, for new possibilities and new beginnings. Ezekiel promised his people hope for a new and brighter and joyful life. He said to them, repent and all will be well! It is possible for a person to repent and change his ways. Even for man who has said a lifetime of “no” can change the “no” into a “yes”. Because, Ezekiel says, the Lord remembers virtuous life and forgets crimes of the past.

Virtue means strength and life. Absence of virtue means weakness and eventual death. A lifetime of sin, saying “no” to God can be changed into a life of “yes”, a life of virtue. A lifetime of “yes”, a life of virtue can also be changed into a life of “no”, a life of sin.

So be vigilant, be cautious, be discerning. Transform negative responses to God into positive ones. You are called to live virtuous lives!

Psalm 25

This is an acrostic (alphabetic) Psalm – each single verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. Read the Psalm carefully and see how the Psalmist speaks of God as “the way, the truth and the life” and asks God to teach him His “way, truth and life” – Jesus will, years later, speak of himself as the way, the truth and the life.

This Psalm carries for us the following insights: Mistakes of the past can weigh heavily and burden my spirit. People can bring me shame, disgrace and dishonor. But I desire God’s way and His way is a way of compassion. I know God’s way can guide me rightly and bring me peace and make me whole. I must accept God’s way; God’s saving rule, God’s wisdom, with reverence. In God’s way, I find forgiveness, grace, peace.

In God, I find a firm, guiding hand, a warm, loving friend, a strong companion on my journey. God shows the way and I follow. I seek to know and embrace God’s truth and God’s life.

**Your ways O Lord, make known to me
Teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
For you are God, my savior.**

Philippians 2:1-11

In this early Christian hymn, the love of Christ, which Christians are called to share and emulate, is described as “self-emptying” love. Christ emptied himself in total giving by dying on the cross. Christians are called to empty themselves in compassion and love.

Paul invited the Philippians and he invites us today to be imitators of Christ, to nurture the mentality of Christ, to make the mind and heart of Christ our own. The mentality of Christ, the spirit with which he lived was one of total giving, emptying himself for all in total surrender to the will of his father. Ordinarily, everything in us, human beings, tend to move toward accomplishments, achievements and fulfillment and the way of the world is toward self-fulfillment. The disciples of Jesus are called to empty themselves for others in love and service.

Give yourself to each other in love and service!

Mathew 21:28-32

This parable speaks of a man who professed obedience to his father and remained unfaithful in practice and another man who verbally rebelled and refused obedience but remained faithful in practice. Neither of them is an ideal. However, the second one seems to have done better, at least he did what had to be done. The ideal would have been the acceptance of the father's direction and following it through. There are some whose profession is much better than their practice. And there are those whose practice is much better than their profession.

The parable challenges us to let our profession and practices meet. It also teaches us that promise can never take the place of performance, that fine words can never be substituted for fine deeds.

This parable proclaims the compassion and mercy of God available to all sinners, to all who have said "no" to God and God's ways. The righteous and the law-abiding people at the time of Jesus regarded the salvation of sinners and tax collectors as impossible. Jesus offered new possibilities for all who have turned away from God. Those who turn to God, away from sinful ways, will always find a welcome. This is the promise of the parable.

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, October 1 - St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and 34 other saints are remembered this day

Marie Françoise Martin was born on January 2, 1873 in Alençon, France to pious parents, both of whom were canonized saints in October 2016. Her mother died when she was four, leaving her father and elder sisters to raise her. At the age of fifteen, she joined the Carmelite convent and was given the name Therese. She lived a life centered on the Gospel. She believed that any life could be a holy one. "To pick up a pin for love can convert a soul" reflected her attitude and she did her daily chores joyfully with love.

Theresa is known as "Little Flower" because she lived her life in a "little way", always ready and willing to do humble, small things without complaining. Greatness lies also in doing little things and doing it well with love. Life of holiness is open to all and it doesn't have to include spectacular events! Just before her death at the age of 24, suffering from tuberculosis, she said, "I promise to spend my heaven doing good on earth".

Thérèse offered herself as a sacrificial victim to the merciful Love of God on June 9, 1895, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity and the following year, on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she noticed the first symptoms of Tuberculosis, the illness which would lead to her death on September 30, 1897 in Lisieux, France

She was canonized a saint on May 17, 1925 by Pope Pius XI and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II in 1997 - 100 years after her death at the age of 24. She is only the third woman to be so proclaimed, after Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa of Avila.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**Compassion is not a doctrine.
It is the deepest and the most meaningful expression of our love
for God and neighbor.**