

First reading Ezekiel 18:25-28

‘When a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed, he shall save his life.’
 Thus says the Lord: ‘You say, “The way of the Lord is not just.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.’

Responsorial Psalm 25(24):4 - 9 R6

Remember your compassion, O Lord.

O Lord, make me know your ways.

Teach me your paths.

Guide me in your truth, and teach me;

for you are the God of my salvation.

and your merciful love, for they are from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth,
 nor my transgressions.

In your merciful love remember me,
 because of your goodness, O Lord.

Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he shows the way to sinners.

He guides the humble in right judgement;
 to the humble he teaches his way.

Second reading Philippians 2:1-11

‘Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.’

Brothers and Sisters: If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy; complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel Acclamation John 10:27

Alleluia, alleluia. My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord, and I know them, and they follow me.

Alleluia.

Gospel Matthew 21:28-32

‘He changed his mind and went. The tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.’

At that time: Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, ‘What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” And he answered, “I will not”, but afterwards he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, “I go, sir”, but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterwards change your minds and believe him.’

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Feast days this week

Monday 28th September: St Wenceslaus

Tuesday 29th September: Sts Michael, Gabriel and Raphael

Wednesday 30th September: St Jerome

Thursday 1st October: St Thérèse of the Child Jesus

Friday 2nd October: The Holy Guardian Angels

Saturday 3rd October: Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Cycle of Prayer

The Harvest, the Fruits of Human Work, and the Reverent Use of Creation

especially on World Day of prayer for the Care of Creation (1 September) and on last Sunday in September or whenever Harvest Festivals are held.

Background

The Church has long celebrated the agricultural harvest. This intention also includes all human work. In all circumstances of human life there are choices to be made regarding the environment and our reverent stewardship of the God's gift of creation.

“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction” (Benedict XVI, homily at Inaugural Mass, 2005). ”

Prayer

*O Lord, good Father, who in your providence
 have entrusted the earth to the human race,
 grant, we pray, that with the fruits harvested from it
 we may be able to sustain life
 and, with your help, always use them for the good of all and for
 future generations.*

Not a Members-Only Club

In Pre-Reformation England, almost all bishops were chosen only from the ranks of the aristocracy. Of course, there was a good economic reason for this: they had to be self-supporting because the people were too poor to pay them. But it was equally true in wealthy countries like France. There too the first requirement in a bishop was that he be from the ranks of the nobility. The great mass of the lower clergy, parish priests and curates, were excluded from bishoprics. The same was true in Ireland until around 1900. Some of the trappings of aristocracy still survive in the church, titles like “princes of the church,” living in “palaces”, forms of address like “Your Lordship” and offering a ringed hand to be kissed rather than shaken.

The beginning of the end of the aristocratic world came when the French Revolution abolished hereditary titles and made all citizens equal before the law. When the Catholic hierarchy was re-established in England and Wales in 1850 the world of the common man was begun and now what titles remain are largely honorary. But old habits die hard, and not only in the church. A new elite has replaced the old. Aristocrats have given way to plutocrats. The exclusive world of privilege never really dies. It only changes hands. The modern rich have all the trappings of the old nobility, save the titles. They live in security-guarded palatial homes and frequent exclusive clubs, to protect them from contamination from the common herd.

The need for exclusivity and superiority seems imbedded in human nature and has invaded even the sanctuary. The Jews were happy with their exclusivity, excluding not only pagans from God’s favour, but even the Samaritans who failed their rigid test of orthodoxy. Jesus was indignant when he told the chief priests and elders, “Prostitutes and tax-collectors are making their way into the kingdom of God before you.” From the Jewish elders to Calvin’s elect, to our own former mantra “outside the church there is no salvation”, exclusivity is a temptation to some religious people. With the diminishing numbers of church-goers and religion no longer a mass phenomenon, we may be more than ever tempted to circle the wagons. So Jesus’ warning to the Jews has a special relevance for us today, as a warning against seeing the church as a “Members-Only” Club.

Keeping an Open Mind

A theme common to all three readings is that of changing one’s mind. Our capacity to change our minds leaves us open to hazard and to hope; hazard when we choose to “renounce our integrity and to commit sin, hope when we choose to renounce sin to become law-abiding and honest” (Isaiah.)

The Gospel story shows us the nobility of a humble change of mind. The first son “thought the better of it.” He was open to change, to better thoughts. The second son was set and closed. The ability to change one’s mind is essential to all healthy relationships. A mind that is closed, whether from pride, stubbornness or stupidity, tends to destroy all relationships—e.g., when we refuse to admit a mistake, when we are unwilling to apologise and change our ways, when we persist in prejudice against a person or group, when we think we know it all.

The second reading, from Philippians, talks of a more specific and positive change of mind: “in your minds, you must be the same as Christ Jesus”, or as an older translation put it, “let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.” This is the direction in which we must be constantly changing our minds day by day.

Paul emphasises one aspect in particular of the mind of Christ—his humble openness and self-emptying in contrast to the conceited grasping and clinging of Adam: “he did not cling to (or grasp at) his equality with God (as Adam did in Eden) but emptied himself.”

Ever since Adam, we are all born as clingers and graspers. The new-born babe has to have a tight grip, and as we get older the grip often gets stronger. Clinging permeates all of life; we cling to people (possessiveness); to things (greed); to power and position (ambition); we cling to opinions (pride.) At the root of our clinging lies fear and insecurity. The apparently strong person who clings aggressively to set ways or ideas is in reality full of fear. Notice your physical reactions to fright; you clench up and grasp at something or someone, as a frightened child clings to its mother.

In the Buddhist tradition, clinging is seen as the root of all suffering. When you are unhappy, it can be enlightening to pursue the question “What am I clinging to?” It might be an idea, a plan, an expectation, power, possessions, reputation, a place, a person, health, even life itself. All wise traditions recommend a light grasp of everything. Anxious clinging leads to misery. As soon as we begin to relax our tight grasp and let go, we begin to be free and happy. (“Letting go” is a useful modern equivalent for “self-emptying.”)

Jesus did not cling. He knew that reality could be trusted, because at the heart of reality is “Abba—dear Father,” and that underneath everything, even death, are the everlasting arms. So he did not cling even to life, “accepting death, death on a cross.” “Into your hands, I commend my spirit.” May this mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus.