

Seton Hall University

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Winter 2011

Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (March 6, 2011)

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**Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections
for Sundays and Festivals**

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NINTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
March 6, 2011

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS

On the threshold of Lent, the Church focuses our attention on the reconciling work of Jesus on the cross and challenges all the faithful to do the will of the heavenly Father in imitation of the Lord.

INVITATION TO REPENTANCE

How have we used God's gifts of the natural and spiritual orders? Through the blood of Jesus, shed for the forgiveness of sins, we receive new life in Baptism. We now acknowledge our need for divine mercy to overcome our faults and failings.

Lord Jesus, you make us children of your Father. Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, you lift us from sin and selfishness. Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you send the Holy Spirit to purify and strengthen us. Lord, have mercy.

HEADINGS FOR THE READINGS

First Reading (Deut 11:18, 26-28). Repeatedly in Deuteronomy Moses called for the people to keep the commandments with all their heart and soul, i.e. from an interior motivation. Obedience to these words brings life, which is ultimately communion with the living God.

Second Reading (Rom 3:21-25, 28). The Christian hope for redemption is grounded in the self-giving of Jesus on the cross.

Gospel (Mt 7:21-27). Faith is the Christian's response to God's gift of justification, which restores humanity to right order with God. The second step is to do the will of the heavenly Father.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

President: Through Baptism into the death-and-resurrection of Jesus we begin the pilgrimage into life eternal. In the uncertainties of daily life we present these petitions.

Reader(s):

May all bishops and pastors manifest the pattern of Christ's charity toward neighbor in their daily lives.

May all Christians follow the challenge of the Gospel to serve the sick and suffering in their midst.

May all who endure the burdens of war and violence be delivered from danger.

May those preparing for Baptism in the Easter Vigil be blessed during the season of Lent.

May all who died recently, especially those who were alone, be granted eternal peace.

President: Heavenly Father, you sent Jesus to guide the world into your service. May all who have accepted the gifts of Baptism be strengthened to cope with the duties of their vocation. Draw us into deeper union with your Son, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

As Jesus prayed to do the Father's will, we unite our life to his as we offer the prayer that he taught.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SIGN OF PEACE

Christ offered the gift of peace to his disciples, so we accept the challenge to become peacemakers in his Name.

COMMUNION REFLECTION

Heavenly Father, may our Lenten observance bring ever greater gratitude for the work of Jesus, consummated on the cross. Renewed by his presence in this Eucharistic sacrifice may we dedicate ourselves to your service.

COMMENTARY

First Reading (Deut 11:18, 26-28). Within the framework of God's gift of the covenant, love can be commanded as the expression of gratitude and loyalty to the Creator who rescued his people from bondage (11:1-4). The land promised to the patriarchs was offered to the generation who were born in the wilderness. Now they who received food and water as gifts would cooperate with God to produce abundant harvests (11:8-12). But if they commit idolatry they will perish from the land (11:13-17). To overcome temptations of infidelity the words of Moses' teaching would be taken into the very core of the Israelites' being, into their heart and soul. Signs of this message remind the people of their covenantal commitment, integrated into the rhythms of daily prayer.

The divine gift of life and all related to it constitute a blessing from God, a word that creates the benefits promised. How do people react to a gift? By accepting it in an act of thanks-and-praise, a blessing in response; or, by rejecting it and wandering from the narrow path. Thus they would bring

the word opposite of a blessing upon themselves. Failure to obey God will lead to idolatry because no creature can be neutral (see Deut 30:1-3, 15-16).

Responsorial Psalm (31:2-4, 17, 24). In the trials of life the psalmist takes refuge in God, who is likened to a rock and fortress. This life is a pilgrimage to communion with God, so he leads and guides the faithful

Second Reading (Rom 3:21-25, 28). In the structured and lengthy letter to introduce himself to the Roman Christians, St. Paul presented a profound theological synthesis. He described the human predicament as alienation from the right order that the Creator had implanted in his work. Because of human error and sin, whereby Israel disobeyed the Law and Gentiles violated their conscience, the Creator and Judge expressed wrath and condemnation. But the coming of Jesus brought a vision of righteousness to those who believe him. They are rescued or redeemed by the sacrifice of Jesus for the expiation of human sinfulness. Being justified, people are restored to right order with God the Father. They are united with Christ so that they can be faithful to God's will. No one can earn this intimate relationship, so it is acknowledged to be pure gift or grace. However, those who respond in faith to the work of Christ must enter into his spirit of obedient service by keeping the commandments. Works or deeds *within* the new covenant and sacrifice of Jesus contribute to our sanctification and "the redemption of the body" in union with the risen Lord (Rom 8:23).

Gospel (Mt 7:21-27). The Sermon on the Mount ends with a scene of the Last Judgment. A proper response to the will of the heavenly Father begins with an act of faith in the Lordship of Jesus but this relationship must become active through deeds of obedient service. In the parable of the wedding five foolish virgins cried out for re-entry into the banquet hall but the Lord replied: "Amen, I say to you, I do not know you" (Mt 25:11-12). Here statements of self-promotion by those being examined are ignored because the use of Jesus' Name (i.e., his manifest presence in the world) was not accompanied by intimacy with him (7:22). "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (7:23). The new covenant, based in the Law written upon the heart, calls for all to know the Lord, from the least to the greatest (Jer 31:33-34). The authenticity of this experiential knowledge of God becomes evident in deeds that imitate the actions of Jesus; this is achieved, not so much in signs and marvels, but in accomplishing the divine will in the duties of daily life.

The message of Jesus must be heard so that these words become the guiding principles for action. This two-step response involves prayerful quiet times and the mature acceptance of responsibility in service. The house of faith will be constructed on a firm foundation (7:24-27).

REFLECTIONS

Deuteronomy, the second giving of the teaching (Law) by Moses, insists on the people's effort to make a profound interior response to the instruction. The daily confession of faith in the one God (6:4) must be completed by love with all the heart, soul and strength (6:5). Are these references to the human person repetitious? No, replied the sages of later times. The heart is the seat of intellect and will, as

well as of the human inclinations toward good and evil. The impulse to evil must be totally under control of the impetus toward good deeds. The person must be willing to sacrifice his or her life (soul) in martyrdom rather than to succumb to idolatry, sexual sin or murder. The third term is rendered into Aramaic by the word *mammon*, which means wealth. Thus everything one accomplishes by use of time, talent and energy must be dedicated to God.

In the Matthean account of Jesus' temptations, the evangelist showed that Jesus rejected giving in to the use of divine power for a selfish purpose. He would not risk his life frivolously, nor would he substitute wealth acquired through idolatry for the total devotion to the heavenly Father (4:1-11). Jesus' interpretation of the parable of the sower makes the same points about three examples of failure to take the Word of God into one's heart (13:18-23).

What practices reinforce this love-commandment? "You shall bind [these words] as a sign upon your hand and they shall be as pendants between your eyes" (Dt 6:8; 11:18). Thus the *tefillin* (phylacteries) contain the words of Deuteronomy 6:5 in the small "boxes" used in men's morning prayer on weekdays. Although Jesus criticized ostentation in using these instruments of devotion (Mt 23:5 and 6:1), he undoubtedly used them in prayer, just as he wore fringes on the four corners of a garment "to remember all the commandments of the Lord" (Num 15:37-39; Mt 9:20).

The teaching of the two ways, expressing the need for a total commitment to the service of God, comes from Deuteronomy (11:26-28; 30:15-20). This is taken up by Jesus with the contrasting images of the narrow gate to the road that leads to life and the highway that leads to hell (Mt 7:13-14).

The biblical tradition understood the Exodus from Egypt and the Covenant and commandments at Mount Sinai to be the gifts of God, fulfilling promises to the Patriarchs. The foundation for Israel's experience of communion with God was a divine blessing and gift; the people's obedience to the commandments was an expression of faithful acceptance of prior gifts of God. Some Jews at the time of Jesus may have stressed the effort to keep the commandments so that the prior gifts were presupposed or ignored. Such an attitude would be akin to the Christian heresy of Pelagianism. St. Paul reacted strongly against this teaching, emphasizing that the work of Jesus, Messiah and Son of God, alone accomplished reconciliation with the Father. Once a person has accepted the gift by the "yes" of faith there is an obligation to keep the commandments as acts of faithfulness (Rom 13:8-10). There is not disagreement between Paul and Matthew; both should be understood as faithful scribes trained for the Kingdom and drawing from the divine treasury what is new and what is old (Mt 13:52).