

26th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year A

Ezekiel 18:25-28

This passage is addressed to the exiles in Babylon, the remnant of dismembered Israel. The theme is personal responsibility.³ Earlier in the chapter Ezekiel wrote of the proverb: “Fathers have eaten green grapes, thus their children’s teeth are on edge.” The people thought that they were punished for the sins of their ancestors rather than their own. Ezekiel makes it quite clear that everyone is responsible for his own sin. It is true that we often suffer from the effects of sins committed by those who came before us. It is also true that we cannot use their mistakes as an excuse for our sins.²

Thus says the Lord:

25You say, “The Lord’s way is not fair!” Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair? The covenant is made with the NATION yet the prescriptions of the covenant are addressed to the INDIVIDUAL. When one defies God, the nation is wounded.³ The Catechism puts it clearly that the least of our acts done in charity works to the profit of all and the reverse is that EVERY SIN HARMS THE COMMUNITY.¹ (CCC 953)

26When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. If a person who has lived a good life turns away from God in sin at the end of life, that person will be punished for his or her sin. God will not force us to accept salvation, so one who turns to sin at the end rejects that gift.⁶

27But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; Ezekiel wants to uphold the justice of God and at the same time to bring cheer to the downcast by reassuring them that they will not be expected to atone for the shortcomings of their fathers.⁴

28since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, If a sinner turns toward God at the end of life, that person will be saved. God wills the salvation of all, so people’s prior sins are less significant than their eventual conversion.⁶ he shall not die. This is an early reference to a life after death.¹⁴

Philippians 2:1-11

Being in prison, Paul was no longer present to personally unite and guide the Church in Philippi. Some preached the gospel from poor motives and there was a probability that the community could fall into factions. In verses 3 to 5 he offers them an antidote: humility, selflessness, and concern for others. Paul loved the Philippians and here he waxes eloquent, begging them to be the perfect reflection of a Christian community. Clearly he saw their potential for being so, and loving them deeply he empowered them to be all they could be. They were a good community and he loved them into being a better one.⁷ Verses 6-11 are a hymn that forms the second half of this passage and it probably pre-dates Paul’s writing of the letter which would make it one of the most ancient of all existing Christian texts.⁵ The passage clearly bears witness to the fact that Christians were proclaiming, even in those very early years, that Jesus, born in Bethlehem, crucified, died and buried, and risen from the dead, was truly both God and man.⁹

Brothers and sisters:

1If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy,

2complete my joy by being of the same mind, This doesn’t mean that we have to agree on everything, but that we should try to think like Christ.⁶ with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Paul seems to be saying: If you want to console me in Christ, PAY ATTENTION TO THE ADVICE I AM ABOUT TO GIVE YOU!⁹

3Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; Many people live only to impress others or to please themselves. This self-centered type of living sows the seeds of discord.² rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, This is our challenge: find something in each person that is superior to ourselves! St. Thomas Aquinas writes: “In every man there are some grounds for others to look on him as superior. Each of us must have the humility to think others better than himself. It is in this spirit that all men are bound to honor

one another.” Humility is the virtue that teaches us that signs of respect for others—their good name, their good faith, their privacy—are not just external conventions, but the first expressions of charity and justice.⁹

4each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others. In all their work and social life, even in things that seem unimportant, ordinary Christians should be upright in all their dealings because their behavior has an effect on others. Don't forget that others expect a CHRISTIAN WITNESS from YOU PERSONALLY!⁹

5Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus, This requires that all Christians, as far as possible, IMITATE CHRIST and reproduce in themselves the sentiments that he had when he was offering himself in sacrifice: sentiments of humility, of adoration, praise and thanksgiving to the divine majesty. It also requires them to become victims, as it were, cultivating a spirit of self-denial according to the precepts of the Gospel, willingly doing works of penance, detesting and expiating their sins.⁹

6Who, though he was in the form of God, This refers to his glory as God, which he did not cling to.⁶ **did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.** Jesus possessed divine equality and its consequent privilege to appear like Yahweh in glory but he did not stand on his dignity as if it were a treasure that he possessed.⁹

7Rather, he emptied himself, Jesus, in becoming man, divested himself of the privilege of divine glory. He did not empty himself of divinity, but he temporarily renounced his privileges and the status of glory to which he had a right and which would all be restored at his exaltation. His voluntary giving up of his glory was the humiliation of the incarnation.⁸ **taking the form of a slave,** The first way Christ humiliated himself—unredeemed human existence is a slavery, a bondage to spiritual powers, ending in death.¹⁴ **coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance,** Jesus, who never ceased being God, became a man like all other men, in all things except sin. By becoming man in the way that he did, he was able, as Isaiah prophesied, to bear our sorrows and to be stricken.⁹ This expression of “taking the form of a slave” highlights the contrast with the title of “Lord” which was ultimately bestowed upon him.⁸

8he humbled himself, This is the second stage of Jesus' humiliation which sums up his whole life on earth and his devotion to the Father, which comes to a climax in death on the cross.⁸ His obedience was the total opposite of “I Did It My Way!” **becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** This lowest depth of Jesus' humiliation when he was the farthest removed from his celestial and glorious status, is set forth in this phrase which was added by Paul to the hymn.⁸ The obedience of Jesus brings to the Christian's mind the contrast between Jesus and Adam. The devil tempted Adam, a mere man, to “be like God.” Jesus Christ, on the contrary, who enjoyed divine glory from all eternity, “emptied himself” and chose the way of humility, the opposite way of Adam.⁹

9Because of this, God greatly exalted him The Father has “superexalted” him, that is, raised him to the loftiest heights which here refers to the Ascension.⁸ **and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,** This name is “Jesus” which is the equivalent of “my Lord”, a substitute for “Yahweh.” It surpasses the name of all other celestial beings.⁸ Although “Jesus” was a fairly common name for Jewish boys, note that GOD bestowed this name on him for “the angel told Mary that she would bear a son and you shall give him the name Jesus.”¹⁰

10that at the name of Jesus In Hebrew, “Jesus” means “God saves” which is both his identity and his mission.¹ (CCC 430) The evil spirits fear this name and, in his name his disciples perform miracles, for the Father grants all they ask in this name.¹ (CCC 434) The name of Jesus is at the heart of Christian prayer. All liturgical prayers conclude with the words “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Hail Mary reaches its high point in the words “blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” The Eastern prayer of the heart, the Jesus Prayer, says, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Many Christians, such as St. Joan of Arc, have died with the one word “Jesus” on their lips.¹ (CCC 435) **every knee should bend,** This universal, cosmic act of religious devotion paid to a sovereign, transfers to the new “Lord”, Jesus, the adoration given before this to Yahweh.⁸ **of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,** Scripture usually speaks of “heaven and earth” when referring to the entire created universe; by mentioning here the underworld, it is emphasizing that nothing escapes his dominion.⁹

11and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is seen here as the FULFILLMENT of Isaiah's prophecy (45:23) about the universal sovereignty of Yahweh: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." **that Jesus Christ is Lord,** This is both an invocation of the name of Jesus and a profession of who he is. **to the glory of God the Father.** The obedience of Jesus brings glory to the Father.⁸ In his obedience, Christ set us an example for we cannot attain the glory of heaven unless we understand the supernatural value of difficulties, ill-health and suffering for these are manifestations of Christ's cross present in our ordinary life. We have to die to ourselves in order to be born again to a new life.⁹

Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: This parable was spoken by Our Lord to the chief priests and elders, representatives of the Sanhedrin or Great Council of the Jews, on one of the days of Holy Week between his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the beginning of his passion on Holy Thursday evening. On the first two days he came to the Temple and taught the people, making a final attempt to win them over. His bitter enemies redoubled their efforts against him. The events of those days, the enthusiasm with which the people had greeted him on Palm Sunday, the cleansing of the Temple that followed, the many miraculous cures he was working, the zeal of the Paschal crowds that flocked around him and displayed such eagerness to hear him, all these infuriated his foes and when they could endure the tense situation no longer, they sent one of their members to ask him by what authority he was acting. In reply, Our Lord put a question to them asking: "What was the origin of John's baptism? Was it divine or merely human?" They thought to themselves, "If we say 'divine' he will ask us, 'Then why did you not put faith in it?' while if we say, 'merely human,' we shall have reason to fear the people, who all regard John as a prophet." So their answer to Jesus was, "We do not know." He said in turn, "Then neither will I tell you on what authority I do the things I do." Jesus then spoke this parable, which should have made plain to them their own dreadful spiritual state.¹² The point of the parable is to provoke them into examining their consciences and changing their approach.
28"What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.'

29He said in reply, 'I will not,' but afterwards changed his mind and went. The sons represent two groups of people: the first are sinners who repented and corrected the course of their lives at the preaching of John. They are like the son who says, "I will not" but then does go.¹³ There is also a secondary theme here for many of the Fathers of the Church also understood this first son as representing the Gentiles.¹²

30The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, 'Yes, sir,' but did not go. The second are Israel's leaders who refuse the Baptist's message, yet they boasted of their faithfulness to God's teaching. They were like the son who says, "I will go" and then does not go.¹³ The Fathers of the Church who understood the first son as representing the Gentiles, saw the second son as representing the Jews.¹²

31Which of the two did his father's will?" They answered, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. It is clear that neither Jesus nor John intended to commend the sin of the tax collectors and prostitutes, only their belief and conversion from their sin. Jesus can work with sin. He can cleanse us of it. But he doesn't have any cure for unrepentance.³

32When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him." God requests the service of all his children. We are all called to work in the Lord's vineyard and words are not enough, deeds are required.¹² Repentance is shown by baptism, confession of sins, and the production of fruits worthy of repentance. John imposes good works: alms given to the poor and the faithful execution of one's duty.¹⁵

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (2) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (3) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (4) "The Book Of Ezekiel" by James C. Turro, (5) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Martin Connell, (6) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (8) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (9) "The Navarre Bible:

Captivity Epistles,” (10) “Life Of Christ” by Fulton J. Sheen, (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew,” (12) “The Parables of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (15) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.