

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of October, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 1, 2017

Read:

Ezekiel 18:25-28
Ps 25:4-5, 8-10, 14
Philippians 2:1-11
Matthew 21:28-32

Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel story was meant to shock people who think they're okay spiritually but do not honestly examine how well they do the Father's will.

Jesus said that tax collectors and prostitutes (professions considered to be the most contemptible and unholy) were entering the kingdom of God ahead of religious experts!

These so-called "experts" knew the correct answer to the question that Jesus posed -- they knew to say yes to God -- but knowing the right answer and actually DOing the right answer is the dividing line between heaven and hell.

God doesn't want right answers; he wants righteous actions. God doesn't want dutiful compliance to Church teachings; he wants obedience motivated by love and an enthusiastic attitude of serving in the mission of the Church.

What's the value of going to Mass every Sunday, for example, if it doesn't result in deeds of holiness outside the Mass? Do you know someone who's saying "no" to coming to Mass? If they're doing good works because they genuinely love God, who's to say they won't reach full unity with him sooner than people who attend every Mass but do little to help others?

God wants us to do both: Know the right answers and be righteous. Go to Mass faithfully and be changed by it. Say yes to his calling to make the world a better place by uniting ourselves to Christ in church and following out him out the door, taking him to everyone we meet.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What opportunities to serve God in your parish or out in the community have you said "no" to?
- † Spend some time praying to understand whether or not that was an invitation from Christ himself. What can you say "yes" to now?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † What types of people today are despised the most?
- † Who seems least likely to get into heaven? (A terrorist perhaps? An ex-spouse?)
- † How is it possible (to our surprise) that we might be greeted by them when we arrive in heaven? How would you feel about it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 15, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Ps 23:1-6

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

Reflect:

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus addresses the problem of fakers: people who try to win his friendship by being religious and showing up for the banquet without entering into a genuine relationship with God.

You know the type: They are friendly as long as it works to their own advantage. They do good deeds but only when it's convenient. They perform Catholic rituals perfectly during Mass but at home they don't even take time to pray. Their faith is so shallow that distractions easily keep them away from Mass. When their relationship with you requires sacrifice or repentance, they abandon you.

Genuine Christians are identified by the presence of God's love within them radiating outward and blessing others, especially when it's not easy to love.

Jesus shows us in today's parable how to handle the fakers. The invitation to join the party is open to everyone, but when people want only the fun of being a friend of God and they ignore the hard work of sharing his love with others, God sets up boundaries against them.

Think of the people you've invited to your banquet table, i.e., into a healthy, Godly relationship, but they've tried to reshape it according to their unhealthiness and immorality. We should love them but not within harmful circumstances. We should do our own part to make the relationship healthy, but when others do not do their part, they've already abandoned the relationship.

God asks us to carry the cross of doing everything possible to invite them to repentance, conversion, and healing. However, healthy boundaries need to remain



in place, and when our efforts are fruitless, eventually God says it's time to let go and move on.

And always, we're to go back out into the byroads to find those who genuinely value Godly friendships.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How many Godly, healthy friendships do you really have?

† Where can you go to find more people who want to be in a holy, Christ-centered, faith-building relationship with you?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What makes a friendship truly good?

† How do you know when the time has come to say no to an unhealthy, unholy relationship?

† How have you handled it?

† Where have you gone to find support and healing and growth?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 29, 2017

Read:

Exodus 22:20-26

Ps 18:2-4, 47, 51

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Matthew 22:34-40

Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading reminds us that we cannot love God without loving ourselves *and* others, but God must always come first.

When we have difficulty loving God with all our heart, mind and soul all the time, every day, every moment, no matter what's going on, it's because we're spending too much time focused on other people and/or on our own plans and wishes.

Yes, we must focus on others in order to love them. And yes we must focus on our own needs so that we can love others *as much* as we love ourselves. Our own needs are important and we are responsible for seeing that our needs get met; otherwise we don't have enough to share with others – enough energy or enthusiasm or kindness or patience. Likewise, we shouldn't focus so much on ourselves that we neglect the needs of others.

So the question then becomes: What are the priorities? In other words: How much time should we spend alone with God? How much time should we spend nurturing ourselves? How much of our time and needs and wants should be sacrificed for the sake of others?

Interestingly, we find the right balance only after we put God first and make our relationship with him our highest priority. This divine friendship is what heals us in our unmet needs. It's what empowers us to love others even when they are difficult to love. And we don't have to be alone with God all day to have intimacy with him.



We love him first and foremost simply by relying on him for success in loving others and ourselves. If we keep turning to him for guidance, healing and strength, we are

loving him with all our heart, mind and soul all the time, every day, every moment, no matter what's going on.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How good are you at setting priorities and keeping God at the top?

† What puts your priorities out of order?

† What can you do to increase God's role in your everyday life?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe some of the techniques you've used to increase God's priority in your everyday life.

† How has focusing on your relationship with God helped you to be more loving to yourself and kinder toward others?

Comments/Prayer Requests: