

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Thu, 08/21/2014 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Isaiah 55:6-9

Psalms 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

Philippians 1:20-24, 27

Matthew 20:1-16

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

Chapter 55 forms the conclusion of Deutero-Isaiah's Book of Consolation (cc. 40-55), written in the mid-sixth century as the Babylonian Exile was coming to an end. The glory of God's forgiveness, almost beyond belief, calls for a response from the people in the form of a return to covenant fidelity. God's ways are unfathomable; his willingness to redeem the people exceeds the prophet's ability to grasp it. What the prophet does know, however, is how urgent it is that sinners forsake their wicked ways and turn to the Lord for mercy and forgiveness. The lavish banquet described at the beginning of the chapter is set for all who are willing to "come" (repeated three times in v. 1) and taste the Lord's goodness.

Scripture scholars have noted that Jesus' parables invariably involved a shocking "twist" which challenged conventional wisdom and invited the listener to re-think reality in an entirely new way. The reality portrayed in the parables was what Jesus called "God's reign," and it required of the



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listener a decision (i.e., a conversion) to be part of that kind of world. (See the Catholic Doctrine section for the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time for a fuller description of the Church's teaching on the "kingdom of God.") Jesus probably told today's parable for the benefit of his critics who objected to his offer of God's unconditional love and forgiveness to those openly recognized as sinners (and, therefore, in their eyes unfit for God's reign). That prostitutes and tax collectors should receive forgiveness without earning it was as absurd as paying all workers equal wages, regardless of how long or hard they have (or have not) worked. The "logic" of the parable is that everyone gets what they need to survive because of the owner's compassion, not because they have earned it. As an expression of the theology which underlies the Church's way of celebrating God's forgiving love, few parables can match today's for capturing the essence of the sacrament of penance.

Catholic Doctrine

The Sacrament of Penance

God loves us completely and unconditionally and from this abundance flows the forgiveness of sins. It is in Jesus Christ that this divine love is fully manifested. The life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus unlocks for us the font of new, risen, healed life as we are incorporated into the mystery of Christ and his Church in baptism. Those who fall into sin after baptism are not baptized again, but instead experience the bountiful mercy and forgiveness of God in the sacrament of reconciliation.

The Catholic Church describes reconciliation in a number of ways. We call it the sacrament of conversion because it celebrates change in the life of the believer who turns back to God and away from sin (CCC 1423). We call it the sacrament of confession because an essential element of this ritual encounter is the disclosing of sins (CCC 1424). We also call it the sacrament of penance because it celebrates one's steps in substituting healthy and holy actions in place of sin (CCC 1423 and 1459). We also call it the sacrament of forgiveness because by it God's loving mercy is experienced (CCC 1422). Finally, we call it the sacrament of reconciliation because it restores and reunites the sinner to God and to the Church, relationships that had been severed or damaged by sin (CCC 1440 and 1445).

How is the rupturing effect of sin repaired in the celebration of reconciliation? First of all, those who are moved by the Spirit to avail themselves of the sacrament do so marked by a radical reorientation of the inner person. In other words, prompted by God's grace, true sorrow for one's sins encourages a person to an inner change of heart and conversion and therefore leads the sinner to be reconciled (CCC 1431). Part of this inner change may also be prompted by an examination of conscience assisted by the Word of God found in scriptures or with the help of a spiritual director.

Then the believer approaches the sacrament. Catholics believe there are four parts to the



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celebration of the sacrament. First, the love of God, which has moved one to celebrate the sacrament, is then expressed by the believer, along with sorrow and contrition for having sinned. In addition, a firm resolution to avoid sin in the future is also expressed (CCC 1451). Second, the sins themselves are admitted. This is always done privately to a priest who presides over the celebration of this sacrament. The priest cannot make use of or reveal under any circumstances these sins (CCC 1467). This private and secret nature of confession is called “the sacramental seal.” Third, the wrong that is done in sinning must be compensated and therefore satisfaction offered. This is also known as penance (CCC 1459–60). While frequently this satisfaction is observed by prayer, it can also extend to concrete activities of charitable works, service of one’s neighbor, and voluntary self-sacrifice. Fourth, the priest extends his hands over the head of the believer in blessing and prays the absolution prayer. The absolution prayer expresses that it is God alone who forgives and reconciles the sinner to himself and to the Church (CCC 1441).

Reconciliation does not merely mean a detachment from sin. The healing brought about in this sacramental encounter works a real change in the person toward holiness and renewal as Christ himself places the lost sheep on his shoulders and brings them back.

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