

► Sunday, August 24, 2008, Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 22:19-23; Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8; Rom 11:33-36; Mt 16:13-20

Week # 1: Main theme: God's desire for our happiness; moral laws lead to happiness.

Who do we say that Jesus is? Hopefully our definition would include the word "God"! But who do we say that God is? Is He a remote law-giver in the sky who gives us arbitrary rules that are impossible to follow? That is a common misconception, even among baptized Christians. What are God's moral laws for, however? What is the Church's teaching on morals for? Are these instruments of a jealous tyrant? Or do they put pleasure in the context of God's wise and loving design for reality, in which human dignity and happiness require that we embrace pleasure intelligently and according to the demands of true love? It is only in terms of God's plan for sexuality that human beings can treat each other with respect rather than selfishly. When wrenched out of the context of the one-flesh union of husband and wife open to life, sexual pleasure does not serve our good. Peter today shows that he trusts in Jesus as his Lord; can we trust that what God wants for our lives is meant to make us happy?

Bulletin: "In the Christian view, chastity by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality or lack of esteem for it: rather it signifies spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it towards its full realization."

Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, #33

► Sunday, August 31, 2008, Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 20:7-9; Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9; Rom 12:1-2; Mt 16:21-27

Week #2: Main theme: True freedom is the freedom to do the good.

“Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

As Paul says in the letter to the Romans, we must allow God’s wise and loving will to transform our thinking, so that we do not think like the dominant culture but like God. We live in a culture of death, in which God’s truth about sexuality, marriage, and life is obscured by self-interest and the selfish pursuit of pleasure. This is why the Church’s teaching on morals is so countercultural. But God’s will for us is a law of life, which frees us to be truly happy. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we please, acting out of emotion rather than out of intelligence; that is actually slavery to our desires. Freedom is being free enough to give ourselves away, even when it is hard. As Jesus tells us, pursuing God’s will involves carrying our cross and dying to our selfish desires, in order to arise with him to new life forever. It is only by Christ’s self-sacrificial love, poured out for us in the Eucharist that will soon be made present on this altar, that we are able to love perfectly. It transforms us completely, so that we are able to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice for true love.

Bulletin: “*The human being is made for love and cannot live without love. When it is manifested as the total gift of two persons in their complementarities, love cannot be reduced to emotions or feelings, much less to mere sexual expression. ... The truth of conjugal love and sexuality exist where there is a full and total gift of persons, with the characteristics of unity and fidelity...*”
Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #223

► Sunday, September 7, 2008, Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ez 33:7-9; Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9; Rom 13:8-10; Mt 18:15-20

Week #3: Main Theme: True freedom is love that is guided by truth.

All you need is love, St. Paul tells us in the letter to the Romans. But he also makes clear that love entails following God's commandments. They are not a bunch of "thou shalt not's," a bunch of random rules from a kill-joy God. Rather, they are the laws that lead to happiness. Moral laws are as necessary to our human flourishing as the natural "laws" (such as gravity) that God has put in place in our world. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever we please, acting out of emotion rather than out of intelligence; that is actually slavery to our desires. Freedom is being free enough to give ourselves away, even when it is hard.

This is why God urges us in the book of Ezekiel to dissuade those who are following a path of unhappiness by not following God's law. Jesus reinforces this lesson. God loves each person into existence. The Father has created us for no other reason than to share His happiness with us. The natural moral law is the path to this happiness of eternal love. This is why the Church never ceases to proclaim even unpopular truths, such as the truth of human sexuality being reserved for marriage. Married love is designed to be lifelong and life-giving, and only in this way can sexual love be real love. Let us recommit ourselves to evangelizing our culture on these important truths!

Bulletin: "Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free."

Pope Benedict XVI, Fifth World Meeting of Families, Valencia, Spain, 7/8/2006

Suggested bulletin insert: "Marriage: God's Loving Plan for Sex"

► Sunday, September 14, 2008, Triumph of the Holy Cross

Num 21:4-9; Ps 78:1-2, 34-35, 36-37, 38; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 3:13-17

Week #4: Main Theme: We are made for self-gift. Marriage, priesthood, and religious life are all about self-gift.

Today's feast focuses our attention on the great means of our salvation, the Cross of Jesus Christ. The Cross shows the ultimate basis for the truth that the Second Vatican Council emphasized: "[M]an ... cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself." God is love, and He gives of himself completely, all the way to death on a cross. And He continues to give of himself in the Eucharist, which makes the sacrifice of the Cross present to us here and now. We are made in his image. We can only fulfill ourselves in imitating Jesus' self-giving. Remember what Pope John Paul II used to say: "Be not afraid!" Be not afraid to give of yourself completely in love! For most of us, this is done in the vocation of marriage. For some of us, we give ourselves in the generous acceptance of the priesthood or religious life. In whatever path, we are given the great gift of being made free enough to give ourselves to God and to others. Let us recommit ourselves today to following our crucified Lord, in order to find ourselves in his Resurrection, in which the enemies of love—sin and death—are finally overcome.

Bulletin: "Just as the Incarnation of the Son of God reveals its true meaning in the Cross, so genuine human love is self-giving and cannot exist if it seeks to detach itself from the Cross."

Pope Benedict XVI, 6/6/2005

► Sunday, September 21, 2008, Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 55:6-9; Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18; Phil 1:20-24, 27; Mt 20:1-16

Week #5: Main Theme: God's moral law leads to our happiness and well-being.

God is not predictable; that truth comes through clearly in today's Gospel. He will always surprise us. But we can always be sure of one thing: all of God's creativity is dedicated to our genuine happiness. His loving mercy is oriented to pulling us, every last one of us, into His Kingdom. If we believe that, we can follow Him and His commandments whole-heartedly. Sometimes we don't understand God's will for us: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Sometimes he asks difficult things of us, especially in matters related to the moral law. But every aspect of the Christian life is designed, according to the Father plan of loving goodness, to getting us into that vineyard and giving us the reward he has in store for us. Let us "magnify Christ" in our bodies, like Paul, and trust in God's wise and loving will.

**Bulletin: "The Lord Jesus ... opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."
Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #24**

Suggested bulletin insert: "What the Church Teaches, Social Science Confirms"

► Sunday, September 28, 2008, Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ez 18:25-28; Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; Phil 2:1-11 or 2:1-5; Mt 21:28-32

Week #6: Main Theme: God and the Church want to heal us of our sins.

“Remember your mercies, O Lord,” the psalm implores. The Gospel reading from Matthew assures us that God does indeed remember His mercy. Even “tax collectors and prostitutes” can enter the Kingdom of God—thieves and those guilty of sexual sin, in other words. Can we trust that Jesus is eagerly waiting to forgive and heal us of our sins, including our sexual sins? God makes his mercy abundantly available in the sacrament of Confession. Go to our loving God; He is eager to forgive. He who became “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross,” in order to save us, will not forget his mercy.

Bulletin: “*The characteristic traits of marriage are: totality, by which the spouses give themselves to each other mutually in every aspect of their person, physical and spiritual; unity which makes them “one flesh” (Gen 2:24); indissolubility and fidelity which the definitive mutual giving of self requires; the fruitfulness to which this naturally opens itself.*”
Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #217

► Sunday, October 5, 2008, Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 5:1-7; Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21:33-43

Week #7: Main Theme: The importance of purity and chastity for true freedom.

The first reading reminds us of the absolute necessity of producing good fruit in our lives. We are to bring forth grapes, not “wild grapes.” How do we bring forth good fruit? The second reading from Philippians points to the way: to keep our hearts and minds fixed on Christ Jesus. Cling to Jesus, especially in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession. God’s grace makes it possible for us to live up the demands of true love. We are to think only of “whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious...” It is imperative that we guard the purity of our minds and our imaginations, especially from demeaning sexual images found in the mass media and in pornography. This will serve the growth of chastity in us, which brings forth the good fruit of purity and freedom. Yes, freedom! Chastity frees us to truly give of ourselves. As the Australian bishops have said, sex “is the language of total gift. If one or both persons are not yet ready to say ‘I give all that I am, including my body’ and ‘I accept from you the gift of all that you are, including your body,’ then they are not ready for sex. If a couple does not fear becoming a real gift to each other, they should not fear marriage.”

Bulletin: “We should say what we mean and mean what we say with sex. And sex says marriage. Sexual intercourse is the body language which accompanies and expresses, again and again, the wedding vows. It is the language of total gift. If one or both persons are not yet ready to say ‘I give all that I am, including my body’ and ‘I accept from you the gift of all that you are, including your body,’ then they are not ready for sex. If a couple does not fear becoming a real gift to each other, they should not fear marriage.”

Australian Bishops Conference, *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2006

Suggested bulletin insert: “Body Language: Speaking the Truth with Our Bodies”

► Sunday, October 12, 2008, Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 25:6-10; Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6; Phil 4:12-14, 19-20; Mt 22:1-14 or 22:1-10

Week #8: Main Theme: Christ is the Bridegroom because He loves the Church with a life-giving love even unto death.

“The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” So begins this week’s parable. Why does Jesus draw the comparison between a wedding feast and God’s kingdom? Think what we celebrate in a wedding banquet: the fidelity of the husband and wife, the promise of new life. Likewise, God’s Kingdom is marked by His fidelity to us, His Church, and by the new spiritual life that He brings about in us. The Church is Christ’s Body, because Christ and the Church are one flesh. Christ has married the Church by loving all of humanity faithfully until death on the Cross. His love is faithful and fruitful; it is a life-giving love that never ends. Human marriage is meant to be the same: it is meant to be a total self-gift that produces new life. And in Christian marriage, God gives us His own love as the animating power of this faithful love of husband and wife.

Bulletin: “It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God’s faithful love.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1648

Suggested bulletin insert: “More Than a Wedding: Why Get Married in the Church?”

► Sunday, October 19, 2008, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 45:1, 4-6; Ps 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10; I Thes 1:1-5; Mt 22:15-21

Week #9: Main Theme: Marriage and the family should be promoted in civic affairs.

The Gospel points out that the Christian is not called to break away from civic society. Jesus did not teach his followers to be separatists. One thing that is due to Caesar is responsible engagement with the culture and with politics. A good Christian must be a good citizen. And in a culture of death, especially of legalized abortion, this is more urgent than ever. Do we bring the truth of human dignity and sexuality into our dealings with others? Do we support life and marriage by our public, cultural, and political activities? Do we evangelize the culture about God's law of life? This is especially the vocation of the laity. As we do this and meet resistance and ridicule, we should remember today's psalm: "All the gods of the nations are things of nought, but the Lord made the heavens."

**Bulletin: "Christians, redeeming the present time and distinguishing eternal realities from their changing expressions, should actively promote the values of marriage and the family, both by the examples of their own lives and by cooperation with other men of good will."
Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, #52**

► Sunday, October 26, 2008, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ex 22:20-26; Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51; I Thes 1:5-10; Mt 22:34-40

Week # 10: Main Theme: Fostering the vocation to love in our society.

What is your vocation? Most people probably think that the word “vocation” refers to becoming a priest or a nun: “He has a vocation,” we say about someone who is called to become a priest. But every human being has a vocation from God. “Vocation” means “calling.” What is God calling you to? Only you can find that out, through prayer, and only you can fulfill your vocation. Are you called to the priesthood? Are you called to religious life? Are you called to marriage?

You can say one thing about every person’s vocation: each and every one of us is called to love. Jesus tells us that today in Matthew: love of God and love of neighbor summarize how God wants human beings to act. It is only through love of God and love of neighbor that we can become happy! As Pope John Paul II said, “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless,” without love.

Most people live out their vocation to love as married persons—as a husband or as a wife, as a father or a mother. The first reading reminds us that societies can make loving easier or more difficult. There are many ways in which our society does not protect the practice of true human and Christian love in marriage and the family. Let us pray that we are given the courage to love and the wisdom to help our society become more welcoming to God’s plan for human happiness: a plan in which sex and marriage are inseparable and in which marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life and open to life.

Bulletin: “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”

Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, #10

Suggested bulletin insert: “Cohabitation vs. Marriage: What’s the Difference?”