

Homily Helps October 1, 2023
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Three weeks until Mission Sunday

In today's responsorial from Psalm 25, we hear: "Remember your mercies, O Lord. Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior."

As believers, we look to Jesus as providing the perfect example of how to conduct our lives. Perhaps we have had moments when we think that his example is too lofty to attain. Maybe we think, "a pious and saintly person can imitate the ways of Christ, but I'm neither pious nor saintly."

Jesus does not let us off the hook that easily. In Matthew, chapter 21, today's gospel reading, he recounts a parable where a father asks his sons to "go out and work in the vineyard today." That is the invitation he makes to us each day.

Some days, we may say "yes," but later make excuses as to why we cannot accept the invitation to be kind, generous, and charitable to others. Other days, we try to resist and say "no," but then recognize that, indeed, because of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist we have a commitment to follow Jesus, to make his light known in the world. Finally, we cannot help but bring Jesus' love and mercy to others. We may try to run away from his sight, but we cannot hide.

Saint Paul in writing to the Philippians brings to focus how the followers of Jesus must act. He says: "... complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others. Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus..."

Though none of us are perfect, Jesus asks that we listen attentively to his word and have malleable hearts and minds ready to let him teach us his ways, so that we can walk in the way of truth.

The way of truth requires that we "humbly regard others as more important than [our]selves, looking out not for [our] own interests, but also for those of others." As Paul exhorts: "Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus." As we have experienced the mercy of Jesus, let us be generous in showing mercy to others.

During this month of October, the Church draws attention to missions throughout the world. The Church invites us to join our Holy Father Pope Francis in praying for and sharing resources with the young, persecuted, and poor Church in over 1,100 dioceses around the world. Our brothers and sisters in need look to us for prayers and support.

May we say "yes" to assisting them in their needs – and mean what we say.



Homily Helps October 8, 2023
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Two weeks until World Mission Sunday

Most people love both giving and receiving gifts. Yet, an essential quality must be present for something to be a gift: it must be freely given and freely received. The readings from Isaiah and St Luke's Gospel speak of the Lord's desire to provide the gift of himself with the offer for humanity to enter into a deep relationship with him. The Lord offered this relationship to the Jewish people first with the special covenant made with them. Then, the offer of salvation was extended to all of humanity with the coming of Christ and the salvific acts of his life, death, and resurrection.

But like with all gifts that we humans give to and receive from one another, even the gift of salvation from and through Christ must be freely given and accepted. Indeed, the Lord offers the gift of himself freely and without condition. Yet the question always remains as to whether we will accept this gift in a meaningful way. Take, for example, Isaiah's description of the Lord's generous and lavish care of Ancient Israel through the metaphor of a carefully tended vineyard. For their part, the Jewish people sometimes did not accept God's gifts to them in their failure to faithfully treat one another with mercy, justice, and peace. Whereas good had planted choice grapes, bitter fruit was reaped instead.

As for the Gospel, this theme continues with Jesus' telling of this parable of a gift freely offered by the Lord but not truly accepted by those with whom he wishes to enter into a deep and saving relationship. The groups of slaves represent the Hebrew prophets of old and new voices, such as John the Baptist calling the people to repentance (to keep the vineyard fruitful). When the people fail to listen to these warnings, as a last resort, the owner of the vineyard sends his son (Jesus), but he, too, is rejected and then killed. When those who should accept the Lord's many gifts by their own generous and faithful response fail at this, the parable tells us that the Lord will offer others this gift of salvation and a relationship with himself. By this, we see that now the gift of salvation moves beyond just the Jewish people but is now extended to all the peoples of the earth.

As we move closer to World Mission Sunday on October 22, these two scripture readings the Church offers us today speak powerfully of Christ's universal mission to provide the gift of salvation to all people. And it also reminds us that we, the baptized, who have accepted this gift have a critical role to play. As we endeavor to say yes to Christ in all aspects of our lives, our acceptance of him is only genuine if we live our lives rooted in the teachings of his Gospel and the teachings of the Church. And a constitutive part of our saying yes is to play an active role supporting the announcement of Christ and his kingdom to all the people, especially those who have yet to hear of him. The Lord has cultivated a beautiful vineyard for all the world to live in.

May we do our part to extend his invitation to all people throughout the world.



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Propagation of the Faith
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Homily Helps – October 15, 2023
Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
One week until Mission Sunday

Five weeks from today the Church will celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, and the kind of kingship we celebrate on this feast is radically different than the way our world normally understands power and authority. Christ was a king who came to serve - his throne was a cross, his crown made not of gold but of thorns, and his regal garments that of his very blood.

With this kind of kingship in mind, today's readings from the prophet Isaiah and St. Matthew each in their own way begin to describe the new way of being Jesus' kingship has inaugurated into the world. Unlike typical kingships in the world, in Christ's kingdom, all will be well provided for, or as Isaiah so beautifully phrases it, all will be fed with "juicy, rich food and pure choice wines." But to accept the Lord's invitation to become guests at this sumptuous feast at which he is the host, we must first recognize our hunger and a willingness to be fed and transformed, especially by how we choose to live our daily lives now rooted in him and his example of a self-sacrificing life of service.

Then amid this reflection on the kingdom Christ invites us to enter, St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians writes of the sustenance and strength he receives from his relationship with Christ, which enables him to meet the challenges he faces each day and cope with every circumstance, in feast or famine. This example of St. Paul can encourage us as we too strive to remain faithful to our commitment as Christians amidst the trials and misfortunes that vex us all.

For us here in the United States, invitations to this wedding banquet, invitations to find salvation in Christ by our baptism into the Church, and a full life as a committed Catholic have come to us thanks to the first missionaries who came to these lands centuries ago. This invitation has been then extended down the years by the lives and good example of countless Catholic men and women, including so many fine priests, Religious sisters and brothers, parents, and educators.

But just like the king in today's parable who extended his welcome to people who formerly were left off the invitation list, the Church continues the task of sending out and supporting missionaries to bring the Gospel to people who have yet to know of Christ and his invitation to his divine banquet.

As we approach World Mission Sunday (October 22), may we both be inspired by the heroic example of the missionaries who brought the faith to us here in America, as well as be mindful of our obligation to spread the Gospel so that all know that they are invited to the heavenly banquet at which Christ is both the host and the food itself in the sacrament of his Body and Blood.



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Homily Helps – October 22, 2023
Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
World Mission Sunday

Each scripture reading at Mass today invites us to appreciate the connection between our personal, deeply-held loyalties and what projects we try to accomplish in life.

The first reading introduces us to Cyrus the Persian, a ruler who ends up being a surprising, yet still very effective, instrument used by the Lord to bring freedom to the Chosen People. (Cyrus, a foreigner and not a Jew, is loyal to his political and military duty, but he achieves what the Lord arranges for him to accomplish because he allows God to work through him.)

In the second reading, Paul and his companions are inspired by loyalty to their mission to proclaim the Good News. But as serious as they are about their own mission, their hearts are open and generous enough to appreciate how other people -- the Christians in Thessalonica, specifically -- are involved in that same work of proclaiming the Gospel in their own way and in their own place.

Most strikingly, in the Gospel reading, we hear what Jesus does when he knows he is walking into a trap. This trap presents what could be an unresolvable challenge to personal loyalty. What is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God? In response, Jesus speaks the truth in a simple way. He asks those around him to consider the standards by which they owe things to an authority, in other words, where their loyalties lie. Jesus helps them -- and us -- acknowledge that while we owe our loyalty ultimately to God, we often must honor that by respecting our duties toward others.

Discipleship requires us to consider to whom I belong; where my loyalties lie; and whom I must serve. Surely each of us is called and strives to remain faithful to some duties in our own place -- towards our families, jobs, neighborhoods, and friends. But if we are to take our faith seriously, we are also concerned about others who are far away from us. These connections to others pull on us especially when we see them in light of our personal relationship with Jesus.

As Christians, we are invested with duties of love for people we have never met and to places we have never been, which is the theme at the heart of the readings for today, World Mission Sunday. That is part of the work of mission: to deepen the connections that already exist between me and someone far away from me to whom I am united in Christ. Perhaps this person is already a Christian and so we are mystically united by our common baptism. Or maybe this person is just now learning of Christ (or desires to know of Christ) and that introduction will be made possible by the work of people who are sent to share the Good News with them. This appreciation might even help me to find the energy and interest to collaborate in work that I personally cannot do because I have responsibilities where I am and cannot go to those places and meet those people. But I can be part of the work through supportive prayer and practical charity.



May the grace we receive in this Eucharist help us all to learn the truth of these loyalties, responsibilities, and connections. And going from this place of worship may we find the energy to deepen our personal commitment to our common Christian mission to announce Christ and his Gospel to all the world.

Let us join our Holy Father Pope Francis in praying for and sharing resources with the young, persecuted, and poor Church in over 1,100 dioceses around the world that benefit from the World Mission Sunday collection, taken in every Catholic parish today, no matter how big or small.



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