

HOMILY 26TH SUN Ordinary Time

September 26/27, 2020

We have all heard of the Golden Rule right? Theologian Leonard Sweet talks of the four “rules that we live by: The Iron Rule – Do to others before they do to you; The Silver Rule – Do to others as they do to you; The Golden Rule – Do to others as you would have them do to you; The Titanium Rule – Do to others as Jesus has done to you. Now that is a rule that we can spend the rest of our lives trying to live up to! We heard in the first reading that the people are complaining to the Lord that his ways are not fair. I for one am glad that the Lord’s ways are unfair because if he always gave me what I deserved I would be in big trouble!

In the Gospel reading, we hear the parable about the father who sent his 2 sons out to work in the vineyard. Son #1 said no, and changed his mind and went anyway. Son #2 said yes and then did not go. Son #1 represents tax collectors and prostitutes. They were considered notorious sinners at the time. They were saying no to God by the way they were living their lives but when they heard John the Baptist, they changed their lives. Some of us are in this category. We are not now living perfect lives, but we are on the spiritual journey and trying to do better. Son #2 represents the chief priests and the elders at the time. What they were saying sounded good, and they looked good, but there was no inner conversion. When they heard John the Baptist, they did not change their lives. They saw no need to reform their lives. Some of us may be there. We are in our comfort zone and do not want to change. The moral of the story is actions speak louder than words. We are all on a spiritual journey and that means constant conversion.

Jesus is not calling us to literally work in the vineyard, but he is calling us to change our lives, to take action. What is Jesus calling us to do? I think we get a very clear message in the second reading today. “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.” Look

at how Jesus humbled himself. God took on human form and became a slave to all of us. That is humility! We are called to put others interest ahead of our own.

I see so many divisions in our country today. I was hoping the pandemic would bring us all closer together to defeat the virus, but in many ways it has done just the opposite. Many things have been politicized that just should not be. People are at different places in their comfort level with the virus. Some people want to just to return to life the way it was and let happen what will happen. Some people are afraid to leave their homes. And we also have everything in between these two extremes. We seem to be doing a lot more judging and condemning these days. I wonder why that is. I think it may have something to do with the fact that the corona virus has in many ways forced us into isolation. All of us are certainly more isolated than we were in the past. I think this may have caused us to be more self-focused. I don't know your story but I sure do know mine!

I think what we need now is to be more empathetic with one another. To empathize with someone we feel the way they feel, not because we are in the same situation, not because you share the same point of view, but because we understand their situation, their point of view, and we can imagine what they are feeling. To do this we have to put ourselves in their shoes. To do this we have to hear each other's stories. If we jump to judgment or condemnation, we cut off our ability to empathize. If we are going to put the interests of others ahead of our own, we have to listen to one another's stories. If we truly empathize with one another, it becomes much easier to identify the loving thing to do.

We have to remember who we are following. We are not following a political party or a particular candidate. We are all followers of Jesus Christ. We all have the same Holy Spirit living inside of us. As Christians we are all walking the spiritual journey together. And as we live through this pandemic, we are all in this together. We are all going to win or we are all going to lose. If we put our faith and trust in Jesus and follow him, we can live through this pandemic together.