

Readings for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost
Ave Maria Catholic Church – Extraordinary Form

Ephesians 3: 13-21

Brethren, I ask you not to lose heart over my afflictions for you; this is your glory. For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 14: 1-11

At that time, when Jesus went into the home of one of the leading Pharisees on the sabbath to dine, the people there were observing him carefully. In front of him, there was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus spoke to the scholars of the law and Pharisees in reply, asking, “Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath or not?” But they kept silent; so he took the man and, after he had healed him, dismissed him. Then he said to them, “Who among you, if your son or ox falls into a cistern, would not immediately pull him out on the sabbath day?” But they were unable to answer his question. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The Silence of the Pharisees

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Lk 14: 1-11

Ave Maria Catholic Church, September 25, 2022 – Fr. David M. Vidal

Today's gospel presents Jesus dining at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, (Lk 14:1-6). That very situation must attract our attention. The Pharisees were plotting against Jesus, were they not? Yes, they were. In fact, in the gospel, it is said that "*they were observing him carefully.*" However, Jesus's love goes beyond their evil intentions. Jesus came to heal the sick, and even though the Pharisees did not want to admit it, they too needed the physician. Jesus was there for them to cure their spiritual blindness.

To cure their spiritual blindness, Jesus asked the scholars of the law and Pharisees this question: "*Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath or not?*"

This is not the first time Jesus introduced this question. St Luke, early in his gospel, reports a similar encounter. At that time, Jesus asked the masters of the law: "*Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?*" (Lk 6:9)

Here we come upon the scholars of the law. They were supposed to know the law, and in fact, they did; however – as it happened in today's gospel – they failed to respond. Even a child will answer that question quickly. Even a child will say without hesitation: "*Master, we must do what is good,*" but the scholars of the law and Pharisees were not interested in proclaiming the truth, so they were silent.

Pharisees would speak about the tithes of mint, the gold of the Temple, the gifts of the altar, and the cleaning of cups and dishes, but before the essential question "what is good and what is evil", they said nothing.

And their wrongdoing went even further because they wanted to remain silent and silence everyone else as well. In their hearts, they were saying: "*Truth should not be spoken. Truth should not be known. Let us close the door that leads to truth.*" By doing that, they tried to close the door leading to God's kingdom. They did not enter themselves, nor did they allow entrance to others who were trying to do so, (Mt 23:13).

Let us remember when Jesus went to Jerusalem, and the crowd began to proclaim: "*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord,*" (Lk. 19:38). Some of the Pharisees told Jesus: "*Rebuke your disciples.*" However, Jesus said: "*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out,*" (Lk 19:40).

The silence of the Pharisees in today's gospel passage contrasts with their usual eloquence in interpreting the law.

Interpreting the Law, the Pharisees added many oral prescriptions that made the practice of the law impracticable. They fell into formalism because of their pride.

Being themselves the authors of many precepts, they believed themselves to be equally the authors of their sanctity. Nobody could reproach them as we learn from their dialogue with the man who was born blind and then healed by Jesus: *“Are you trying to teach us ... you a sinner through and through ever since you were born! And they ejected him,”* (John 9:34).

For that reason, they began to oppose Our Lord from the beginning of His public life. Jesus’ teaching was not in any way conformed to their school of instruction. And the doctrine that Jesus preached and the way He required them to act were in complete opposition to their opinions and lives.

For that very reason, they were silent.

The Pharisees were not only mute but also tone-deaf.

As they rejected the plan of God for themselves, Jesus applies these words to their actions: *“We played the flute for you, but you did not dance. We sang a mournful song, but you did not weep,”* (Lk 7:31-35)

They were tone-deaf; they had a lack of perception of spiritual matters. When a person is tone-deaf on spiritual matters, humility is interpreted as pride, kindness as an offense, and love as hatred.

But where is the problem? It is not in the music played but in the one listening to it. And that is the problem: how hard it is to recognize that one is spiritually tone-deaf. It is hard to admit that one is not truly wise and does not perceive things as they truly are, according to God’s view.

How can we overcome silence and deafness in our spiritual life?

Apart from the general means such as recollection, a life of prayer, fidelity to grace, and humility, we can dispose ourselves to accept God’s wisdom by the following means:

First, we must see and evaluate all things from God’s point of view.

What truly matters is God’s view, not mine. Saint Ignatius denounces those *willing to do God’s will whenever it happens to coincide with their own interests*. However, our first interest must be to know and follow God’s will in our lives. That is the beginning of holiness on earth and what will make us eternally blessed.

Second, we must fight against worldly wisdom, which is foolishness in the eyes of God.

Some people rely more on the “wisdom of the world” than on “God’s wisdom;” looking for shortcuts, mingling with the most popular opinions, and searching for recognition and not necessarily for what is good or true. But in truth, worldly wisdom does not go far.

Finally, we must proclaim what is right and denounce what is evil.

Love is a messenger. Because of their love, martyrs proclaimed the truth by dying in the midst of their torments with the hope of eternal life. Because of their love, apostles, pastors, and missionaries all over the centuries proclaimed the truth by saying to those who wanted to stop their teaching: “*We must obey God rather than men,*” (Act 5: 29).

Love is a messenger. Love is communicative. Lovers don’t remain silent. Lovers proclaim the truth because *they do not seek their own interest; they do not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoice with the truth,* (1 Cor 13: 4).

May we always be attentive to God’s words. May we listen to and understand. May we embrace his words with our hearts and proclaim the coming of his kingdom to us. Amen