

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Rom. 12: 16-21

Brethren: do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.

Mt 8: 1-13

At that time, when Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And then a leper approached, did him homage, and said, "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will do it. Be made clean." His leprosy was cleansed immediately. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." When he entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him, saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully." He said to him, "I will come and cure him." The centurion said in reply, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." And Jesus said to the centurion, "You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you." And at that very hour [his] servant was healed.

Domine, Non Sum Dignus

Third Sunday after Epiphany – Rom 12: 16-21 / Mt. 8: 1-13
Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 23, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof.” This sentence taken from today’s Gospel has deserved a place in the Sacred Liturgy, when right before the moment of Holy Communion we say: *“Domine, non sum dignus . . . Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”*

How important it is to acknowledge this fact: *“I am not worthy,”* and for several reasons. We could spend a great deal of time giving solid arguments regarding our unworthiness. For the sake of time, we can summarize them in three points:

First, the “I am not worthy” describes our condition of creatures.

What are we? Let us go back to the book of Genesis 2:7. Here we read that *“the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”*

If we are tempted to exalt ourselves, let us remember that we were taken from the dust of the earth. Let us remember there was a time when we were not, and then, there was a time when we were created. When we were not in this world, the world was still spinning, and nobody noticed our absence or even missed our presence.

And who is God? The book of Wisdom answers this question beautifully: *“Before you the whole universe is as a grain from a balance, or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth.... How could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?”* (Wis. 11:22.25). If the whole universe with all that is in it counts as a grain or a drop of morning dew in comparison to God, what are we? The answer is: *“Lord, I am not worthy.”*

Second, the “I am not worthy” describes our condition of people who have inherited a fallen nature.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 405) teaches that original sin is *“a deprivation of original holiness and justice. Human nature has not been totally corrupted, but it is wounded in the natural powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined to sin.”*

Original sin affects us personally and it also has a universal impact because it affects our interior, and it also affects our external actions that cause the suffering of so many others. Our wounded nature tries to drag us down, tries to force us down to earth, and to make us more worldly. For this reason, we say: *“Lord, I am not worthy.”*

Third, the “I am not worthy” describes our condition of sinners.

Perhaps, we may try to blame our first parents: *“It is their fault.”* However, that is not quite true because it is my fault too. Though it is true, we carry the guilt of Adam and Eve in our lives by generation, we must also acknowledge that we “imitate Adam and Eve” when we sin.

What is personal sin? Sin is above all an offense against God. In psalm 50, King David asks forgiveness for his sin by saying: *“Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,”* (Ps. 50:4). Sin is a personal act that involves awareness and willingness to do things that we consider the best for us here and now (when in truth they are not). These acts are evil acts because they are opposed to God’s providential order and will. They cause our suffering and the suffering of many. They offend God, and they hurt us.

Being aware of that heavy load, we can truly say: *“Lord, I am not worthy.”*

However, the “I am not worthy” is not a statement that leads us to despair or depression.

On the contrary, the *“I am not worthy”* must always be for us, words of hope. I know that I am not worthy, but I also know that God in his mercy came to save me. Christ took our nature, suffered for us, died for us, rose from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty. With Him our human nature was elevated to a place it has never been before, above the choirs of angels.

Then, we can see that even though our unworthiness is beyond words, the work of redemption leaves us completely speechless. How do we describe the greatness of Jesus’s love for us sinners? For this reason, at the beginning of the Easter Vigil in the Paschal Proclamation is said: *“O Felix Culpa”* (Oh Happy Fault) that merited such and so great a Redeemer!”

The “I am not worthy” is not a statement of resignation either.

A false reading of the *“I am not worthy”* leads us to say: *“I am nothing, therefore, I do nothing.”* That statement is simply false. That statement comes from a lazy heart that perceives the challenge but does not want to do anything to face it.

It reminds us of the servant who received one gold coin from the king and goes and hides it. When the Lord comes to request an account of the use of His money, the servant simply says: *“‘Sir, here is your gold coin; I kept it stored away in a handkerchief, for I was afraid of you, because you are a demanding person; you take up what you did not lay down and you harvest what you did not plant,’”* (Lk. 19: 20-21).

His action was unwise, and his answer was even more foolish. Was not that gold coin the property of the Lord, and if it was, how can he say that the Lord takes up what he does not lay down and harvest what he does not plant?

He also claims that the Lord is a “*demanding person*,” but the Lord rewards according to his gifts. He praised the one who received ten gold coins and produced another ten in the same way that he praised the servant who received only five gold coins and brought another five.

The servant with only one gold coin had only to challenge himself to work for an additional one, but he did not feel up to the task. The blame was not the Lord’s, but the servant’s lack of desire to do something good.

Likewise, we cannot say that we did not receive anything. We all have received talents of which one day we must give an account. We are unworthy in many ways, but at the same time, we must realize that God has given us gifts and we must not bury them out of pride imagining they are ours and we do with them as we want, or out of distrust thinking that God who started the work in us is not capable of its completion.

We must have the courage of Saint Paul, who in today’s reading teaches us: “*Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.*”

Vince in bono malum (conquer evil with good).

This is the correct reading of the “I am not worthy.” We recognize our flaws, and we are humbled by them. We are truly sorry for them, but at the same time we recognize that evil will never be changed by doing more evil. That is not the proper answer to our actual condition of sinners who are walking on the way with the hope of paradise.

Saint Paul teaches us in his first letter to the Corinthians: “*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder,*” (1 Cor. 15:10). We should say and do the same.

We must have the courage and the heart “to do good,” to conquer evil, wherever it may be present, either in us or in others. Always with good. Saint Paul goes as far as to say: “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink,*” (Rom 12:20). Some people may want to answer evil with evil, but that is not a wise plan, because the evil act, first and foremost, hurts the person who commits it.

Therefore, we say: Lord, I am not worthy, I know my deficiencies and flaws, but trusting in your love and grace I am up to the challenge. I know that all is yours and I do not want to bury the talents that you have given me. I want to overcome all evil with good, in my life and in the life of others. Lord, I am not worthy, but help me to do good, only say the word and my soul shall be healed. Amen