

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

---

We probably all heard the proverb “**the road to perdition is paved with good intentions**”. In fact the first half of the expression has been the title of several movies in the past. An alternative form is “**hell is full of good meanings, but heaven is full of good works**”. What may surprise you is that it is attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux who wrote around 1150 in French, “*L'enfer est plein de bonnes volontés et désirs*” (hell is full of good wishes and desires). However, there is an earlier saying in Virgil's *Aeneid*: “*facilis descensus Averno* (It is easy to go to hell)”. Others think however, the saying is rooted in the Bible verse which states in Ephesians 2:8-9, “<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> it is not from works, so no one may boast.” This has been interpreted to mean that without faith, good works are useless and will not gain entry into heaven. There are many verses on this subject in Scripture including the ones we hear today. Overall, I suspect most would agree the meaning of these phrases, is that individuals may have the intention to undertake good actions but nevertheless fail to take action. This inaction may be due to procrastination, laziness or other vices. Therefore, the saying is an admonishment that a good intention or attitude is meaningless unless followed through with good actions.

So once again we have a collection of readings that may not be as clear as they might first appear. We should start with the first reading. Ezekiel takes a step back and talks about intentions and the fact that works will be judged by the intent of such works. We almost can see the prophet pointing the finger at his listeners that it is absurd to think that God changes because we don't want to take action on how the Father's will is presented to us. We can all find many excuses included God Himself for avoiding the issues. And yes each one of us has been created uniquely. We are all collections of matter and spirit put together living in unique times, conditions, and circumstances but with a purpose - all for the opportunity to ultimately live with the Father. We all get the chance to say “yes” or “no” because of free will. So we are ultimately will be judged not by what we have been given, good or bad, but by how much we accept it all and turn it into a “yes” to cooperate in bringing glory to the Father. To put it even simpler, judgment at the end of our lives will be based on how well we cooperated with the Will of the Father. And so we have an essential part in our doing what is right. Our intellect needs to says yes to God's law, and our wills also must cooperate with God's will. Repeatedly acting in this way builds virtues, so that rather than dying through sin, our souls are more and more alive. The word “alive” here has the same meaning as in the famous expression of St. Irenaeus: “The glory of God is man fully alive.” Therefore we need to seriously understand the challenges we are given no matter how inconvenient, contrary to our sensibilities or desires, how different from all the other voices around us, what language or images it comes to us in, or how much effort it will take.

Similarly we find St Paul telling the Philippians in simple language that is difficult to hear and probably also act rightly. He tells us and them, “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than your selves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.” So we once again get very specific and focused advice and today we hear our intentions and attitudes toward others needs to be like those of Jesus. It is the opposite of selfishness, opposite of vainglory, and opposite of everyone only looking out for their own interests. It is humbly regarding others as more important than oneself and actively looking out for the interests of others. It is encouraging others, giving loving solace to others, listening to what the Holy Spirit wants you to say and do for the others, showing compassion and mercy toward the others, and everyone being of one mind in love. This attitude lived by Christ, can best and most easily be seen in His self-emptying, in His taking the form of a slave, humbling Himself and “becoming obedient” to the Father's will “to the point of death,

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A

---

even on a cross!” Jesus the Son of God freely and willingly put aside his “God-ness” so he could be truly human. It is the ultimate expression of humility. We desire to have everything, to be highly esteemed, and to be important, to be exalted and glorified, yet the way to this is through our own self-emptying out of love.

Finally we come to the Gospel. It always seemed easy to me to see this as the battle for right intentions that arise sometimes in us all. It is good for us to follow the story and ask the question, “Who did the Father’s will?” Somehow we are reminded what the answer always needs to be. Jesus puts the choice in such easy language. The one who follows up with action and lives a righteous life, does the Father’s will. John the Baptist definitely did the Father’s will by proclaiming and living “in the way of righteousness.” Tax collectors and prostitutes, who seemed to be saying by their lives, “I will not,” *did* God’s will. Chief priests and elders of the people, who seemed to be saying by their lives, “I will,” did *not* do God’s will. Not even seeing the good example of the repentant sinners changed the minds of the seemingly righteous. So the story is about the end of the day when all the dust has settled. The one who takes the appropriate action is the one who does the will of the Father. Our argumentative and capricious desires get in the way of our “yes” many times and then we seek need reconciliation and then go out and do the will of the Father. However, the best is to straight away say yes to God’s will and then to do it, like Mary, “who heard the word of God and kept it” (Lk 11:28).

So, our Faith teaches us that God’s will for us is entirely good, a far greater good than we can even imagine. So, in theory, it is easy to say, “Thy will be done.” But it is often not easy to do so in practice. One of the most basic aspects of our human condition is that we want pleasure and happiness and hate pain and suffering. This is why we resist and so may reject the will of God. We see that what God wants or what we think he wants will make us suffer or prevent us from being happy. This is why the first brother said he would *not* go out into the field to work and why the second brother said he *would* but *did not*. The things that happen to us can be accepted and even embraced as coming to us from God for our good or the good of others. We can do this even when what happens is objectively bad: God is not sending us the evil but permitting it so He and we will draw a greater good out of it. Similarly, many things that are the will of God and that we can see are perfectly good are just hard. For example, it is hard to obey one of the commandments when a strong passion is making us want to disobey it. It is hard to act virtuously when we are weak in that virtue. Also, there are the things we actively set out to do: We might think: “I think it is God’s will that I do *this*” And then come setbacks, contradictions, obstacles, and opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. So what are we to do to accomplish the Will of the Father? St. Jose Maria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei, had a succinct and very practical formula we can aspire to, when it comes to the will of God because life is about living it every day. St Escriva recommend - “Stages – first we need to be resigned to the will of God; then to conform to the will of God; then move on to want the will of God; and finally to love the will of God”, found in the *Way* 774.

Ultimately our intentions and our actions need to be bound together by loving the will of the Father for us – every day.