

Homily

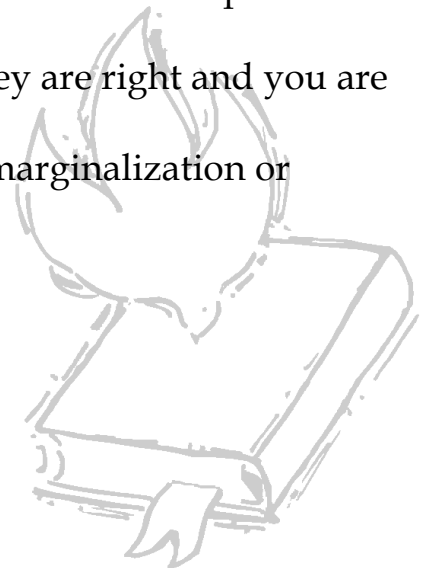
23rd Sunday OT - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
September 09-10, 2023

Ez 33: 7-9
Ps 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Rm 13: 8-10
Mt 18: 15-20

Say what you will about our society; say what you will about our human history. As we have learned, history teaches us that whatever dominant culture seems to be ruling at any particular time, the dominant culture is going to impress upon you their views and will try to condition others to believe that their views are the correct view. When they do, the dominant culture will go so far as to impress they are right and you are wrong.

This is the way our society and the dominant culture has worked for ages. Whether it is a religion that is in power, a government that is in power or a family that is in power, the dominant culture will push their agenda upon those they serve / rule because they are right and you are wrong. This type of “forced” belief is a type of marginalization or



discrimination that does not follow the dominant culture's view and essentially casts anyone who disagrees with them as a type of enemy.

Ever since Adam and Eve took a bite of that fruit, ever since Cain killed Abel, some individuals who push their desires and agendas against those who choose not to live this way will impress themselves onto society until that individual or culture gets its way. Sometimes, that agenda can be as just one; sometimes not. Some dominant cultures dictate their way over others out of jealousy, anger, hatred or anything that opposes Christian charity.

At this particular moment of history in the United States and throughout the world, our dominant cultures often vilify the ways of the Catholic Church (as well as many other religions). We learn in our scriptures that time and time again, we keep breaking that covenant with God because the dominant culture directs itself towards a lifestyle or belief that does not conform to the will of God. In the Old Testament, in the case of today's readings especially during the time of Ezekiel, we learned how the dominant culture focused on a type of idolatry that

turned away from God and turned its way towards the things of the world.

As we read in the Old Testament, God made a promise to protect the Chosen People on their Promised Land as long as the Chosen People chose to follow God and not the ways of the world. The kings who ruled at the time disregarded God and were disobedient to the covenant; the dominant culture of the time turned the faithful away from God and towards the way of sin. As a result, God took away the Promised Land from the Chosen People due to this disobedience.

Society as a whole turning away from God and desiring to be led by any culture that is not God has happened in practically every age, among every set of people. If we are disobedient to God, if we are disobedient to love, bad things happen. Even when we do love, bad things happen because the world is the way it is. Despite the warning of the prophets of the Old Testament or the prophets of today's age who warn the faithful to adhere to the covenant, some people in the world are going to do what they do because, as a general rule, people often

worship the wrong god and ultimately suffer the consequences of what they inappropriately worship.

When we were kicked out of that garden of Eden because we were conditioned by a serpent to follow a way contrary to God, because we did not put trust in God, we then choose to become our own God; this is the sin of *pride*, the worst of the capital sins. Pride often conditions a person to act as if the person is God and can create their own parameters in which to live.

What the scriptures show us today is that we are not like God; we are supposed to be humble servants. We are supposed to take care of others, especially those who might disagree with us, especially those who hate us. That is one of the many themes from the gospel of Matthew as well. In Matthew's pericope from the Sermon on the Mount (Chapters 5-7), God tries to condition us so that we can get to heaven. God's basic teachings concerning love one's enemies and to treat others in the way that you wish them to treat you is a basic cornerstone found in most religious traditions.

If we love our enemies as God teaches us, if we follow the ways of God rather than being conditions to live sinfully as society wishes us to do, we are going to be hated by the world. (Lord knows I am hated by many in the world (and certainly among some of the clerics from the Joliet Diocese) because I chose to protect kids when others in the clergy did not. As a result of turning away from the dominant culture that chose not to protect kids, I paid the price by swimming against the current.

Often, the goals on earth often focus on making money, having power and gaining the admiration of others (Luke would call these a type of negative beatitudes of being happy, fat, popular and rich – see Lk 6: 20-38). If we truly wish to be with God in heaven for the remainder of our existence, we are taught and conditioned to live a virtuous life, to be like God instead of replacing God with our own value set. To achieve that goal, to be like Christ, we have to make sacrifices necessary for the sake of others, to love thy enemy, to love the other person.

Some in our dominant culture will argue that God loves everyone (which is true) and that God will enable others to do what they want

because God will forgive and support any person, no matter the sin (which is *not* true). Some Church leaders will go so far as to “bless” mortal sin indirectly, arguing that even sinners can be blessed by God, that God blesses the sinner but not the sin. This is a tricky slope to follow – we cannot advocate mortal sin and we cannot bless mortal sin because, as the Catechism teaches us, mortal sin turns us away from God and we should not bless someone with God’s grace if a person deliberately chooses to abandon God while, at the same time, seeks grace from God as if God should bless a person who replaces God with their own desires and ways of life (see Catechism #1855). This is not my view; this is the Church’s view that cannot be changed.

When we commit mortal sin, when we abandon the teachings of our faith and tradition, we exclude ourselves from God’s grace; even though God loves us and wants us to get to heaven, by deliberately turning away from God because “we want what we want,” we are telling our parent that we choose not to follow the rules of the parents’ house. I can only imagine what would happen in the house of any given family if a

child deliberately decides to disobey what a parent tells him or her to do.

In Matthew's gospel, we are taught that if we have a disagreement with a dominant culture that does not wish to follow God's way, there is a specific set of instructions God teaches us to follow. According to Matthew's gospel, the Lord teaches us that when someone is not following the will of God, each of us is obligated to confront the person, one-on-one. If the person chooses not to listen, then we are instructed to bring people to accompany us so that we can try and turn that person back to God's grace. If this is not possible, then we pray for the person but we turn away from that person so that we do not follow that person's life of sin (Mt 18: 15-20).

No matter what, we are still called to love. We are conditioned by God to pray for the sinner (this is a spiritual work of mercy because we hope for their conversion. We pray that one day the sinner might turn away from sin and return to a life of grace. As much as we grieve when a family member turns to a life of sin, we also need to remember that God is waiting for the entire world to return to the life of grace and the

culture and way of life that will get them to heaven, knowing that a good number in the world will choose not to follow God and follow man instead.

God waits for you and me to do the same, according to the gospel message. We have to be diligent in this faith; to swim against the tide of the dominant culture is not easy by any means and often will result in lots of grief in our life which often becomes shorter because of the sacrifices we make on our part. We are taught that our goal in life is not longevity on earth; a hundred years from now, none of us will be living on earth. Our goal is to get to heaven and if we want to get to heaven, we must be conditioned by the only culture that should really matter – the love of God that requires us to “die” to others so that others may have a chance to live.

This is why the Golden Rule and the teachings especially from Matthew’s gospel serve as the foundation by which we should live our lives: love thy neighbor, do unto others treat those well who even treat you badly because the measure by which you measure is the one that is going to be measured on you (Matthew 6-7). So let us be conditioned to

live a culture of love, regardless of how the world treats us. Let us make it a measure of faith and hope and give that opportunity for the kingdom of heaven to every person we encounter, even if they do not want our prayers and love, because that is what God did for us on the cross.

Let us not take what we have been given for granted. Let us not dismiss the teachings from our scriptures, which condition us to live in a way that will get us to the other side of life after death. Let us embrace that cross and allow God to work through us so we can make a difference for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.