

Bible Study

Twentieth-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) Lord our God, you are the source of all wisdom. Help us to hear your guiding, encouraging voice in the words we read today. May our reflections lead us to know you better and to love you more, so that we see every situation through your eyes. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Re-connecting Question

1. What type of offense is most difficult for you to forgive?
2. Can you recall a time when you felt that God was far away from you, only to discover later that God was really very close to you all along?

Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 55:6 –9

“Seek the Lord!” was a familiar call for the Hebrews to come to the temple in Jerusalem for a special occasion of prayer. In this reading, written during the exile in Babylon, the prophet reminded the people of God that they could turn to the Lord anywhere they happened to be and receive God’s generous mercy right there. Their return to faithfulness would prepare them for God’s marvelous gift of returning them to their homeland and the temple.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Is verse 6 telling us that God only offers limited opportunities to seek God’s presence? If not, to what do you think “while he may be found” refers?
2. There are only 2 things that we need to do in order to receive God’s forgiveness for our sins. What is it?
3. Verse 9 is almost identical to 1 Samuel 16:7. To what did it refer that time? Do you see similarities?
4. What is the connected meaning between verses 7-8 and verse 9?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Saint Paul established the first Christian community on the continent of Europe in Philippi. Later, while in prison, probably in nearby Ephesus, he wrote this letter to the beloved Christian Philippians. Saint Paul is not being overly dramatic in this reading; his death is a distinct possibility. Prisoners in those days had few if any rights. They often died either from torture or neglect, or they left prison on their way to a death sentence. In spite of that, Saint Paul’s thoughts are primarily on the Christian communities, not on himself.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What, according to Saint Paul, is the advantage of his remaining on this earth?
2. That leads to his statement that “life is Christ.” What, then, does the statement mean for him?
3. And in what way would dying be a gain compared to living?
4. As Paul struggles to accept both possibilities – living or dying – how does he say the Philippians should live?
5. How does that also apply to us?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:1-16a

This story appears only in Matthew’s Gospel. It is a parable that Jesus told after the rich young man walked away, disappointed upon learning that he could not earn salvation just by keeping laws, while still loving his wealth. The parable is not a lesson on the just treatment of employees, but rather a lesson about salvation and faith. We can’t earn heaven, but God is eager to give it to us.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. What was your “gut-reaction” to hearing the end of that parable? Explain.
2. If this is a parable about faith and salvation, what does the offer of employment symbolize?
3. Notice that those who were hired first did not ask for more money at the end of the day! What did they ask?
4. The last verse occurs several times, in various forms, in all 4 Gospels. While not predicting a reversal of earthly fortunes, what does it proclaim about heaven?
5. Which sentence from the First Reading might Jesus have chosen to add as a conclusion to the story?
6. If Jesus were telling this parable in our day, what might he have chosen as the setting?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. Is there a type of person that you have a hard time imagining as being in heaven some day?
2. How will you feel if you do discover them waiting for you in heaven when you die?
3. Is God unfair?
4. In what ways is God's ability to forgive different from yours?
5. Then, why shouldn't we "live it up," doing anything that we desire, as long as possible and then turn to God right at the very end of our lives, asking for forgiveness and salvation? (This was actually attempted in the late third century and at other times by certain prominent people.)
6. Can you name a way or a time that God has already blessed you in this life far beyond what you deserved?

Closing Prayer – The Fatima Prayer

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. And lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of thy mercy. Amen." (Sign of the Cross)