

Homily for the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the beautiful things about the first reading is the delight Moses has in belonging to God and he wants this delight for his people. “No other people is as wise and as prudent as this great nation,” he says.

Why?

Because, this people knows that God does not bow to the will of the people. People are not wiser than God. No other nation in that time, nor could any now, make the claim that their gods were not out to get more than they were willing to give. Even the modern-day idols we often call greed, power, self-gratification, to name a few, may give some benefit to individuals for a time but, ultimately, the idols flourish more than the people and when idols flourish, a society forgets how to care and to love. Such a society forgets how to have faith.

What sets our God apart from all others is that our God wants to give more than receive. No other God would send an only Son to become a sacrifice because the people for whom he was sacrificing, did not have the resources enough to offer God. Even though we really couldn't expect God to do so much for us, God chose to do it. Wise and prudent people are those who believe that God's love surpasses all else.

James writes that “All that is good and everything that is perfect comes down from the Father of all light.” With God there is no alteration, no shadow of a change.

With God there is only clarity and that is why we come to this celebration. We come to free ourselves of doubt. There is much which happens in this world which has us mistrusting our true value. We let shadows fall across our image of God because we let sin block what God thinks of us. We let questions of self-worth misrepresent the giftedness God has presented us. All of this leads to doubt. Let alone the uncertainties of a pandemic.

As James says, God is the Father of all light and, as we know, God is the Father of ‘the Light of the World’ who is clearly an act of love from a God who wants to give more than receive.

It is this clarity, as James says, which brings pure, unspoilt religion: help of the orphans and widows: in fact, anyone we can love without expecting to receive.

The Gospel reveals Jesus' ongoing arguments with the Pharisees and scribes whom, we might say, had spoilt religion. Interestingly, in this particular case in the Gospel today, mention is made of washing arms and dishes.

Modern Jewish scholars are mystified as to where these traditions came from. They are not found anywhere in their own Jewish writings.

They believe these so-called traditions were probably brought into place to keep people at the mercy of the Pharisees.

Modern Jewish Scholars do not speak favourably of the Pharisees. They were a particular sect who controlled people by holding up the fear of punishment from God. They

established themselves as the judges of right and wrong and the administrators of God's condemnation. They were a strength to be reckoned with in the time of Jesus.

Of particular note and reason for the dislike of the Pharisees by the Jews of today, was that the Pharisees had a history of siding with foreign kings, all for the sake of power, which often undid the safety and wellbeing of the people of God.

This is the context in which Jesus found himself where he often argued with the Pharisees and Scribes, as we see today.

For Jesus, the outcome of any life which does not receive what God wants to give, will only bring from within it, a murky response to what life should be about. If we desire that life fulfil our selfish desires, how badly our decision making will go.

However, a life which receives love from God, who wants to give more than receive, co-operates with God who is wiser than us. It can't get much clearer than that.