

HOMILY for 25th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Readings discuss with us about God's way; reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A college freshman was sitting on a campus bench holding an open Bible & shouting, "Hallelujah! God is great!"

Before long, a skeptical professor happened to pass by. Hearing the young man's praises, he asked what he was reading.

"The Book of Exodus," the freshman replied. "Did you know what God is able to do? I just read that He parted the Red Sea & led the whole nation of Israel right through the middle."

The professor chuckled, sat down next to the young man, & decided to share the latest theories on the Bible account. "That can all be very easily explained," the professor said. "Modern scholarship has shown that the Red Sea in that area was only ten inches deep at that time. It would have been no problem for the Israelites simply to wade across."

The young man was quiet for a moment, his gaze slowly moving from the professor back to the open Bible in his lap. The skeptic, satisfied that he had set the young man straight, got up to leave. But, before the professor had taken two steps, the young man began to shout again, "Hallelujah! God is great!"

At the loss for words, the professor asked, "What... why...?"

"God is greater than I thought!" the freshman gushed. "Not only did He lead the whole nation of Israel through the Red Sea, He drowned the whole Egyptian army in ten inches of water!"

Anyway, as you can see, God's way is mysterious & incomprehensible. Several Sundays ago, the readings told us about God's will & encouraged us to conform our will to it. For it is God's will that everything on earth & in Heaven would turn out to be. That is why every time we pray the "Our Father" we wish that God's will would be done without any major problem and long delay. This Sunday the readings explain to us how God's will is slowly revealed to us in this world & let us see God's way in our daily life. If God's will is a thought/idea, God's way is the real action that we can see & feel in our daily life. One of those divine actions is revealed to us in the parable of the owner of an estate & his hired workers in this Sunday's Gospel. Let me try to contrast that divine act with our human one & help you see its differences.

Here is how the parable is shared with us in this Sunday's Gospel: "...When the evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workmen & give them their pay, but begin with the last group & end with the first.' When those hired late in the afternoon came up, they received a full day's pay; & when the first group appeared, they supposed they would get more; yet they received the same daily wage. Thereupon they complained to the owner... But, 'My friend,' he [the owner] said in reply, 'I do you no injustice. You agreed on the usual wage, did you not? Take your pay & go home. I intend to give this man who was hired last the same pay as you. I am free to do as I please with my money, am I not? Or, are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last shall be first & the first shall be last."

God's way is indeed different from our human way in two aspects. First, God turns our human logic & order upside down as God begins to compensate the last person first & the first person last. That means we cannot apply our human logic & order on God's way & assume that we could figure out how God would act. For God would always surprise us & leave us baffled as we examine its outcome. However, the divine logic & order of beginning with the last person & ending with the first seems to imply that God extends mercy & care to the lowly & the forsaken of our world in the next life. That surely fits well with the Beatitudes that Jesus shared with us in the Gospel as He blessed the poor & the lowly & promised them the whole Kingdom of God.

Lastly, our human way of compensation might appear just/fair as we want to pay the worker who has labored long hours more than the one with less hours. But, we learn in this Sunday's Gospel that God's way of compensation is all about generosity as God wants to pay the worker who has labored less hours the same as the one with long hours. God appears to put the virtue of generosity above our human concept of fairness & wants us to practice it in our daily life. That way we can lift up the lowly & the forsaken of society & make our current world a better place. So, those two differences really distinguish God's way from our human way.

I encourage you to read the Bible to examine some divine-intervention stories in our human history & try to figure out God's way & try to apply it in your daily life. For now, let me pick a couple of those stories to help us understand God's way a little better. This first story comes from the Old Testament about Joseph – one of Jacob's sons – who was rejected by his siblings out of envy. He was thrown into a dry well to be left for dead & then sold as a slave to an Egyptian merchant without any future at all. While being held in jail with other Egyptians, Joseph realized one of God's gifts to him & was able to make good use of it by trying to interpret dreams for a couple of inmates. His reputation came to King Pharaoh, who curiously wanted to ask him to help with interpreting his royal dreams. Joseph did a great job for the King & was promoted to be in charge of preparing the whole kingdom for the upcoming historical drought & famine in the region. Later on, Joseph was able to be re-united with his family & help out not only his loved ones but also the entire Egyptian population from his grain storage. My friends, when we first look at this story, we probably wonder why God would allow something awful like that happen to poor Joseph & how it might end. As you can see, God's way might look confusing & painful at first. But, in the end, it would bring blessings & salvation to a lot of people.

The second story that I'd like to discuss & help us understand God's way is the one in the New Testament about the visit of an angel to St. Joseph in a dream to let him know that King Herod was searching for his adopted son Jesus to kill him, & he would have to take the Holy Family at night across the border & lay low in Egypt for a while. If we were St. Joseph, we would wonder if that was really God's way or a crazy dream that we had that long night. We would not follow through with it; & we might put our families in danger by doing it our way. In this story, we learn that God's way can be revealed to us in a dream. We might expect God to tell us the whole plan in details in the middle of the day on how to do something. But, as you can see, God communicates to us at night, even in our dreams. So, we got to welcome God's messages to us 24/7 & be ready to do it at the moment notice.

My dear brothers & sisters, this Sunday's First Reading encourages us to do this about God's way: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call to Him while He is near... For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the Heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways & my thoughts above your thoughts." God's way is always good & full of blessings for us in the end. Maybe it might be painful & hard for us to accept it right now. Because we want to do things our own way at the moment. But, by figuring out God's way & following it, we'll end up with true peace & happiness for ourselves & lots of others around us as well.