

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Adopted from 'Catholic Exponent'

' Old Deuteronomy's lived a long time/ He's a cat who has lived many lives in succession/ He was famous in proverb and famous in rhyme/ A long time before Queen Victoria's accession/ Old Deuteronomy's buried nine wives/ And more I am tempted to say ninety-nine/ And his numerous progeny prospers and thrives/ And the village is proud of him in his decline/ At the sight of that placid and bland physiognomy/ When he sits in the sun on the vicarage wall/ The oldest inhabitant croaks.'

'Well of all things can it be really/ No, yes, ho, hi , oh my eye!/ My mind may be wandering but I confess/ I believe it is Deuteronomy.'

This poem from T. S. Eliot's ' Old possum Book of Practical Cats ' has been popularized in the hit musical ' Cats. ' It speaks of an ancient, venerable cat named Deuteronomy. He was well known to all in the community. His proverbs were famous and his spirit permeated the entire village. Like Deuteronomy, the cat, the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy was known and loved by the members of the Church for whom St. Matthew wrote. The sayings and spirit of the Jewish Law permeate Matthew's Gospel.

Today's Gospel presents a procedure for correcting a member of the Church who persists in sin. The procedure does not originate with Jesus. It is derived from the Torah, especially the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy . The same directions are echoed throughout the Old Testament. They are reiterated by Ezechiel in today's first reading.

The topic is what is commonly called ' fraternal correction. ' The Gospel points to its importance and at the same time is sensitive to its difficulty. The ultimate concern is for the salvation of an erring member of the Christian family.

Matthew conceives the Church as a tightly knit, caring and concerned family (See 12:46-50). In such a family, if one member sins seriously the others instinctively seek out the transgressor and privately urge him or her to come back. The procedure occurs daily within our families as parents train their children and discipline adolescents. Children, in turn, remind parents when they forget and do the same things the children have been taught not to do.

Matthew envisions this same brotherly and sisterly correction, which occurs normally and naturally within families, as the ideal for spiritual growth among adults in the Church.

Based on Deuteronomy, Ezechiel speaks of fraternal correction as an obligation. He points out that correcting a wayward brother or sister is an obligation upon which our very salvation depends. If we do not speak out, we are held responsible of the spiritual death of the sinner.

Paul, writing to the Romans, stresses love in the fundamental virtue to guide our fraternal correction of others. When we proceed with genuine love we do not set out to win an argument or to humiliate our friends. We address what is authentically good in sinners in order that their basic goodness becomes more visible and effective in guiding their future actions. When we lovingly correct others we enhance and affirm what is valuable them.

To correct with love implies sharing the pain of the mistakes. When discussing sinful behavior we are bonded in suffering for we have been there ourselves. We weep with those who are weeping, we are shamed with those who are shamed, we feel helpless with the helpless and impulsive.

Correction is not an exercise in proving the wrong to be wrong or the right to be right. Deep down we all know the immorality of serious sin. We understand the adultery, murder, stealing and coveting are wrong. It is best to assume this of others. Correction seeks to motivate, to reveal unsuspected sources of strength, to revitalize ideals, to find and encourage what seems lost.

Correction is never easy. No matter how well we prepare or how deeply we are motivated by love, the task is difficult. That is why we would sooner avoid it.

The next time we recognize the deep down need to speak to another about actions inappropriate to the Christian life perhaps we will be strengthened by our realizations that this is our obligation in love.

In the words of T.S. Eliot: ' my legs may be tottery I must go slow/ And be careful of old Deuteronomy. '

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Ezechiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

September 7, 2014

靈 修 生 活

常 年 期 第 廿 三 主 日

羅哲兄弟所創立的泰澤團體吸引了不同基督宗派背景的人士，在團體共同生活見證修和與共融的理想，亦吸引了來自世界各地的青年，在共融的讚頌歌聲和簡樸生活中，找到天主的影子，與他人修和，重拾信仰的希望，有勇氣面對生活挑戰。羅哲兄弟為見證修和共融，奉獻了他的一生，甚至成為全燔祭，在祈禱中為共融合一的事功見證到流血的地步，呼出最後一口氣。

罪惡是使人分裂的主因，所以當耶穌在加里肋亞宣講時，第一句說話就是「時期已滿，天國臨近了，你們悔改，信從福音」(谷一 15)，耶穌勸化眾人要接受福音悔改自新，以促成天人間及至眾人修和。這星期的主日讀經正好指出要達修和的主要途徑，就是要履行兄弟間規勸之道，若果沒有履行這職責，厄則克耳先知說得很清楚，天主定要在我們身上追討祂的血債。當然我們不是因為怕被追血債才去規勸，而是天主實在不願見到任何人喪亡，在基督的一生所作的言行最清楚不過的表現出來。這個天主的心意，就在這主日的保祿宗徒致羅馬人書「愛你的近人如同你自己」的話表露出來，這樣就沒有對人有任何虧欠了。

耶穌在福音更籍著規勸之道說明「賺得了弟兄」的重要：有時當我們見到別人犯錯，便會用指斥的態度指出他的不是，甚至更仗著自己有理，把人罵得抬不起頭來，可能骨子裡想把別人踏在腳下而抬高自己，為賺得別人的欣賞，以滿足一己的私心。這種態度與耶穌所說的規勸之道，想賺得弟兄回頭的心願，有天壤之別。所以耶穌在這規勸之道的教導是用心良苦的，為賺得那弟兄，首先要尊重他，在獨處時規勸；若果無效，帶多一兩人同去，使自己的觀點也能客觀一些，使對方能容易接受；若仍然無效，通知教會有關事實，這裡其實不是要教會成為人間是非的判官，而是在這困難的時刻，邀請耶穌介入，求天主的真理在祈禱中被揭示和彰顯，只要人們同心合意的祈求，基督就在中間，而天父必會成全，因為每人都是天主父所珍視的。

人间的不和、分裂、誤會實在消耗了很多精力和能量，使人為應付它帶來的傷害，破壞了人間辛苦所建立了的關係和互信，多時這傷口久久不能撫平，使人在傷痛中度日，甚至在精神上產生困擾；這樣的生命是缺乏質素和不愉快的，亦非上主所願的。罪惡的果實就是使天主與人、人與人、人與大地間產生決裂，痛苦和死亡因此被引進世界內，以致真光來到自己的地方，但世界卻不認識祂，兄弟間的互相競爭，人要勞苦流血流汗才能得食辛勞的成果，這個因罪而產生的缺口，要因基督的犧牲才能把人從罪惡的分裂中解放出來；在人類的歷史中，接二連三的分裂、敵對、仇怨等犧牲了不少人的生命。今天羅哲兄弟在致力人類邁向共融的漫長道路中亦付出了生命，他的犧牲能為人類帶來合一的果實嗎？但我們深信無辜者的血和義人的犧牲同樣獲得上主的悅納，這使人類向救恩邁進另一步。願上主因那些致力共融合一人士的努力和犧牲能促使人類早日在祂內團結合一。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 九 月 七 日

則 33:7-9; 羅 13:8-10; 瑪 18:15-20