

THE TWO WAYS

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

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In the cycle of readings for the Traditional Mass, today's liturgy introduces a theme that we will be hearing for the next few Sundays—the theme of the “two ways” or the “two kingdoms”¹. You will find the contrast of the “two ways” first in the prayers of the Mass. In the Collect at the beginning of the Mass we humbly ask God to “keep us from all that is hurtful and grant us all that is to our good.”² and at the end of the Mass the Postcommunion asks that God's healing grace “detach us from our sinful ways and lead us to those that are right.”³ Both the Offertory and Secret prayers speak of how the sacrifices of the Old Covenant typify the sacrifice of the New Covenant. But it is in today's Epistle and Gospel that this theme of the “two ways” is most evident when they speak of the slaves of God vs. slaves of sin, the fruitful tree vs. the barren tree, action vs. empty words. They point out the “two ways” to us, but also direct our attention to the results of each of these two ways.

In the Epistle St. Paul presents us with two contrasting ways of life: as slaves to sin or as slaves of God. His initial motivation was to remind the Romans of their former pagan past when they had been slaves to a mistress of sin, a demanding mistress, who compelled them to serve her almost as if they had lost the power of their own wills. But this message wasn't addressed only to the Romans. It was addressed to all sinners of all times, to us, because as Jesus Himself said, “Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin.”⁴ And St. Paul asks: “What is the fruit of your former life?” More sin and vice, which ultimately leads to the eternal death of hell.⁵

After reminding them of their former ways, St. Paul tells the Roman converts that now that they have broken the chains of slavery to sin, they have abandoned their former mistress and become instead slaves to God. The word “slave” implies a total loss of freedom, someone who can no longer make decisions about oneself because another has full power and authority over him. “A slave has no will of his own, he belongs wholly to his lord.”⁶ People living a life of sin have the illusion that they are their own masters but when a person places himself in the service of sin he becomes enslaved to it as to a ruthless and demanding taskmaster. Instead of liberating, as so many today think, sin becomes an absolute master. And once one is shackled to sin, the person's will becomes so weak that it is usually very difficult, sometimes almost impossible to free oneself from it. He is no longer free; just as anyone struggling with an addiction to pornography will tell you. The sinner fools himself into thinking that he is liberated when in fact he is locked in the prison of his own sinful inclinations with Satan as his jailer.

The person, who places himself in the service of God, on the other hand, fully recognizes that he can never be his own master because he has been purchased once and for all by the blood of Christ. But in contrast to the enslavement of sin, the slave of God does not lose his freedom and retains full use of his will but he exercises it in a manner that perfectly conforms with God's will. In freely choosing God's way, this person frees himself from the shackles of this world and of his own self. By becoming a slave to God one actually gains one's freedom, whereas the slave to sin loses it. Mary, the holiest

person that ever lived, called herself the “handmaid of the Lord”. And by serving Him and placing Herself totally under His will, She has become the most exalted creature in the universe.

“It is comparatively easy to distinguish the slaves of sin from the servants of God, for whoever panders to sin must say ... I am not true to Christ. A much more difficult problem is to distinguish the Christian who is clever at talking religion from one who really practices it.”⁷ This is what today’s gospel is speaking about. Christ specifically warns His followers about false teachers, who prey upon the flock like wolves but His warning also includes those, whose words appear holy, but whose hearts harbor pride, malice, hatred or the desire to manipulate. The Christian, who gives the appearance, sometimes very believable, of being devout and pious, without a life motivated by charity and humility, is really putting on a façade and acting much like Satan, who allures his victims under the pretext of good. He whispers to his victims, “That [isn’t] avarice but prudent foresight, frugality. ... That [isn’t] vengeance but justice.”⁸ There are not a few of such Catholics around. Jesus was therefore warning us about the self righteous Christian, who spares no words to show their exemplary practice of the faith but who will try to impress upon others how they are right. These are the “Lord, Lord” Christians, whose actions belie their true character bereft of charity and humility.

In today’s gospel, Christ gives us norms by which we can distinguish a true Christian from a false one. The Christian resembles a tree. It may look like a healthy tree standing tall, green and lush with foliage, even covered with blossoms, but if it doesn’t bear any fruit, then it’s worthless and doesn’t resemble a true Christian. It isn’t the ones whose talk is pious, who will win favor in God’s eyes, but rather those who quietly do His will without a lot of extraneous talk.

The contrasts found in today’s liturgy may be envisioned as two scenes: one of war and one of peace. In the first, the king of this world, Lucifer is sitting on a throne of fire and smoke ordering his legions to go into the world and lead mankind astray, laying snares, arousing desires for earthy goods and honor, cultivating pride. At the same time, there is another throne, the throne of Christ the King, who is also enlisting his soldiers to go into the world and win souls for His kingdom. The wages of Satan’s followers—everlasting death. But the wages of the Cross and renunciation of the world for the sake of Christ—life everlasting in His heavenly kingdom.

The second scene is one of a beautiful peaceful well tended orchard. Countless red apples are ripening on the rows and rows of trees but among them stands one heavy with foliage but barren. The owner of the orchard wants to cut it down because year after year it has been pleasing to the eyes but hasn’t produced anything. Just as in the parable, which St. Luke recounts, the caretaker pleads with the owner. “Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.”⁹

In the two scenes above, we clearly see the theme of the “two ways.” The first was an option between Christ and Satan. In the second, we are in the garden of the Church in which every Christian is a tree. The caretaker is Christ, watering and nurturing each one. Some have been fruitful. Some haven’t.

The principal lesson of today’s readings? To show us how we must always be discerning throughout our life in order to distinguish between genuine Christianity and counterfeit Christianity, the true way of Christian life or the false way. Because

remember, Christ said: “It is not those who say to me, Lord, Lord, who will go into the kingdom of heaven; but those who do the will of my Father in heaven, they will enter the kingdom.”¹⁰

¹ Adapted from Seventh Sunday after Pentecost in: Parsch, Pius, *The Church's Year of Grace*, vol. 4 (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, Minn., 1958), 80-89.

² Collect, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.

³ Postcommunion, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.

⁴ John 8:34.

⁵ Romans 6:21.

⁶ Parsch, *The Church's*, 85.

⁷ Parsch, *The Church's*, 86.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Luke 13:7-9.

¹⁰ Matthew 7:21.