

THE TWO WAYS (7th Sunday after Pentecost)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

11 July 2010

The theme of today's Mass is "the two ways." Through rich imagery, Jesus and St. Paul present us with a dichotomy of spiritual contrasts and their consequences. And these are readings that perfectly match the season—summertime. Jesus, who always had a way with words, speaks about grapes and figs, thorn bushes and thistles, and the fruits of a harvest—the harvest of sinful deeds or righteous deeds, of right teaching or false teaching.

In his letter to the Christians of Rome, St. Paul first addresses what we do. He says that we have a choice: we can use our bodies to either spread wickedness or to advance in holiness. If we choose the first, we will be slaves of sin. If we choose the latter, we can advance in holiness as slaves of God and of His justice. A few years before he had written this letter to the Romans, he wrote to the Galatians on this same subject by contrasting the works of the flesh with the works of the spirit. "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."¹ Despite the illusion that we have total control over our own lives, St. Paul tells us that we will always be slaves: either slaves to sin or slaves to God. The choice is ours.

St. Paul then contrasts the consequences of our actions. He asks the Roman Christians: "What return did you then have from the deeds of which you are now ashamed?"² He writes that the return for their deeds, the end to which they lead, is death, spiritual death. The wage paid out to the slaves of sin is the eternal death of hell. For the slaves of God, however, he speaks not of wages, but of fruits and gifts. This fruit is advance in holiness and its end is eternal life. Sin's slaves receive wages. God's slaves receive a gift because Jesus Christ has already purchased us for Himself.

St. Paul wrote of what we do with our bodies. Jesus, on the other hand, spoke of what is in our heart and what we say. His immediate reference was those scribes and Pharisees, who lived a life of hypocrisy, those of whom He said: "You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth . . . on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing."³ But Jesus was also referring to those, who would later appear among them, who would give the appearance of teachers of the faith, prophets He called them, but who would not be true. He called them ravening wolves, thorn bushes and thistles. Not very flattering. And just as St. Paul, He spoke about fruits. A rotten tree does not produce good fruit and a good tree does not produce bad fruit. Just like slaves to sin, the wages paid out to the tree that produces bad fruit will be the eternal death because it will be cut down and thrown into the fires of hell.

Jesus was applying the principle on which His New Law would be based: that is, it is not only important to do the right thing but also to have the right intention in one's heart. That's why false prophets don't produce good fruit. They may do all the right things and say

all the right things but what's in their hearts is only "filth ... hypocrisy and evildoing." They appear to belong to the flock but if one is patient, it will become apparent that their lives do not produce good fruit. Their pretty and pious words will not be enough to save them, for Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."⁴

The same principle applies today. It isn't how many Rosaries you pray a day, or how many prayer groups you attend, or whether you attend the Latin Mass or how piously you genuflect, but whether you do the will of the Father. All of these things are good in themselves but they are only external acts. Only those, who have their wills totally conformed to His will, will enter the kingdom of heaven. Don't think that someone is saintly only because he acts piously. Judge a person rather by the fruits that he produces.

We have to be slaves, not of our own bodies and of our own desires, slaves to sin, but slaves, body and soul, mind and heart, of God alone. St. Paul refers to this as being "slaves of justice" or "slaves of righteousness." We encounter this concept in the Old Testament but it achieves a new significance with Jesus, who tells us that "righteousness" is the "right conduct" by which one begins a new life in the spirit. It is being "right" with God, who saved and vindicated us through His Death and Resurrection, giving us a new life, so that we are no longer our own. For, we have been purchased for a price and, as a result, have become slaves of God. We are made righteous through God's grace won for us by Christ's redemptive death and resurrection.⁵ And the new righteousness of which St. Paul writes is, therefore, not merely moral goodness achieved by following the law as demanded of the Jews in the Old Covenant. It is deliverance from sin and a new life in the spirit, as opposed to the lawlessness of sin as light is to darkness.⁶

The waters of Baptism washed away our unrighteousness in the eyes of God. It purchased us from the slavery of sin and set us free from the clutches of the evil serpent annihilating all of his rights over us. But when we were set free from the shackles of that master, we became the slaves of another Master and we must do the work that He demands of us—cooperation with the grace of the sacrament in order to continue the work of righteousness that Baptism began, "ever cutting down the vile and noxious weeds which are ever cropping up."⁷ Holy Baptism, having, of itself alone, operated in the wretched slave of sin what God alone could empower it to achieve—summons man, now that his chains have fallen, to join her in the glorious work of maintaining his liberty; she invites him to share with her the honor of the divine victory over Satan and his works.⁸

"Detach us from our sinful ways and lead us to those what are right."⁹

¹ Galatians 5:19-23.

² Romans 6:21.

³ Matthew 23:27-28.

⁴ Matthew 7:21.

⁵ Romans 5:1, 18.

⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:14.

⁷ Gueranger, R.R. Dom Prosper, *The Liturgical Year: The Time After Pentecost*, translated by Rev. Dom Laurence Shepherd, (James Duffy and Sons: Dublin, 1883), 183.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Postcommunion verse, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.