

October 1, 2023
Cycle A – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ezekiel 18:25-28

Psalms 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Philippians 2:1-11

Matthew 21:28-32

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: "I am God. There is no other."
(Isaiah 45)

1. Today's reading from Philippians is one of the most beautiful, instructive and challenging in the whole New Testament. It is also one of my favorites. Here it is for your spiritual enrichment:

"¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

2. Paul begins by calling his converts from Philippi to unity among themselves and bases it on Jesus' example of humility and service of others. Consequently they must, with God's grace, make the very mind of Jesus and his example their own.
 - a. Though Jesus was in the "form" of God – means that he was and is equal to the Father.

- b. He chose not to cling to the privileges of his divine status whereas Adam “grasped” the forbidden fruit to be like God, to have status, enjoy prestige. For Jesus, none of that. This must be the norm for all his disciples.
- c. He “emptied himself” by taking on the form of a servant. To “empty himself” is like putting a shade over a lightbulb. He remains God’s son while becoming a man like us in every way except sin. It is only on certain occasions that his glory shines through such as the Transfiguration and the miracle of Cana.
- d. To empty himself includes becoming the servant of humanity who, like the Suffering Servant in the Prophet Isaiah, “takes on himself the evil of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)
- So he humbles himself, undergoing the most horrible and shameful death, death on a cross after being beaten, tortured, crowned with thorns, mocked and abandoned by his followers. Only his mother along with some women friends and the Evangelist John remain to watch him die a slow and exceedingly painful death.
 - Thus if Christians have ideas of grandeur, of putting themselves above others, they must dispel them if they wish to be like their master, follow him and be saved... White Supremacists, racists
 - People who call themselves Christian completely ignore the Master’s example when they look down on others, belittle them, scorn them or make them the butt of idiotic jokes or pranks.
- e. This is not the end of the story. Because Jesus was obedient to his Father, because he didn’t run away and hide when he knew the authorities were after him, the Father raised him up from the dead. Moreover, his Father restored the glory Jesus had with him before the world was created. And he gave him the name “Lord” (Kyrie in Greek) so that people everywhere and all creation must adore him as they would the Father because the Father is glorified when people truly believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, equal to the Father in every way.

3. Examples of people who serve and who unite their respective communities and families: The medical personnel who care for patients with COVID-19, mothers who work in their homes and in the marketplace, fathers who work long hours and even two jobs, people who volunteer to help those who are in greater need than themselves, police who serve with distinction and who suffer because of the bad actions of a handful and so the list goes on.
4. Moreover true disciples of Jesus will strive for unity in their families, parishes and workplaces even if it means humbling ourselves as Jesus did.
5. Eucharist: It is Jesus who sums up in the Eucharistic action all he is and did for us. It is really Jesus and not merely a symbol.
 - May he give us his Holy Spirit in abundance so that we can think, feel and act as he does, even if it means emptying and humbling ourselves for the greater good.

Amen.