

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time A

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 * Psalm 103 * 1 Corinthians 3:16-23 * Matthew 5:38-48

The scriptures today go into great detail to teach us how we are to behave as we go about our work in the Kingdom of God. In the military they have their general orders. In the business world they have the employee handbook. Both teach us how to behave as a good soldier or a good employee. Today Jesus gives us these teaching in the Sermon on the Mount to teach us how to become good apostles of Jesus Christ.

From Leviticus:

Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

From Psalm 103:

He redeems your life from destruction,

crowns you with kindness and compassion.

As a father has compassion on his children,

so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

From Corinthians:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God,

and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

So, let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you. . . and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

From the Gospel of Matthew:

Give to the one who asks of you and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

that you may be children of your heavenly Father.

All these teachings show us how to live a happy and peaceful life, but as important as these lessons are to our spiritual well-being, I think we need to remember that it is not all about us and our happiness. Rather, I think that they are lessons on how to go about our work in the kingdom of God so as to have the eyes to see and the ears to hear the Holy Spirit as he accompanies us and instructs us how to go about our work in the kingdom of God. If we listen, hear and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we become a tool in the hand of God working to bring about justice and peace in the kingdom of God here on earth.

I love being a carpenter. I love imagining a project and then building it with my own two hands. It can be something practical and functional, something so strong that it will last the test of time. It can also be something beautiful, something that becomes both pleasing to the eye and soothing to the touch. But I cannot begin a project without my tools. I love my table saw and my miter box. They help me to cut lumber straight and true, but the most versatile tool I have in my toolbox is my cordless drill. I just happened to have one with me.

I love the shape of it. It fits so perfectly in the palm of my hand, and it has good balance so it is easy to guide the bit into the head of a screw and drive it home. The drill gets its power from a battery pack. That makes it portable so that I can take it anywhere and put it to work immediately without dragging a cord along and looking for a power source. When all the power is spent from the battery, it disconnects easily and fits perfectly into the battery charger. No work gets done when the battery is dead, but when fully charged the drill accomplishes its work effortlessly. Indeed, this drill is a perfect tool for the purpose for which it was created.

Yes, I have a lesson in mind for all of this. If we behave as God teaches today while we are at work in his kingdom, we become a tool in the hand of God. We fit comfortably in the palm of his hand, and it just feels right. We are able to balance the mission with the needs of the people so we can all work together for a common goal without creating jealousy or resentments. When he imagines a project for us, he sends us the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can accomplish his work everywhere we go without delay.

Sometimes working in the kingdom of God can be frustrating and even exhausting. That is when we need to recharge our batteries through prayer, silence before the Blessed Sacrament, or even better, by attending a retreat like the Christian Experience Weekend. The CEW women are meeting this weekend at the Pilgrim Heights Retreat Center east of Marshalltown. Pray that their spiritual batteries will be fully charged this weekend. The CEW men meet in the same place next weekend. Applications are in the slots at the entry of the church. Consider going to the next CEW to recharge your spiritual batteries. I serve on the Diaconate Formation Board for the Archdiocese of Dubuque, so every spring we have interviews with everyone going through the diaconate formation process. I never tire of hearing the candidates and their wives witnessing how important CEW has been to their faith journey.

Jesus sums up his lesson in the Gospel of Matthew when he says, "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect". Biblical scholars tell us that the Greek word for *perfect* is *teleios*. *Teleios* is the adjective formed from the noun *telos*. *Telos* means an *end*, a *purpose*, an *aim*, a *goal*. In other words, a person is perfect if he understands and carries out the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world.

So, become that perfect tool in the hand of God powered by the Holy Spirit and instructed in the word of God. As we begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday, look for ways to recharge your spiritual batteries. Keep your ears open to hear and your eyes open to see the mission God sends you to accomplish. Do that without hesitating, and you will understand and accomplish the work of God, and the kingdom of God will be one person closer to perfection.

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