

# NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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The world is not the way God created it to be and so our lives are filled with moments that are less than ideal.

- ❖ Treated in ways that are contrary to the life of love God intends for us; some minor, some major
- ❖ In today's gospel lesson, Jesus is presented with something major: divorce
- ❖ What makes this such a major source of pain and suffering is clear in Jesus' response: when the man and woman are joined in Holy Matrimony, "the two shall become one flesh." They are losing a part of their own self.

Having said that, I want to take a step back from marriage and divorce because there are a lot of other things that bring us pain and the way we receive them makes all the difference in how we come to know God. Even though Jesus is responding directly to a specific question, the way he does should offer some consolation to all of us, no matter what we're suffering.

You see, there are two ways to approach suffering. We see this explicitly when Jesus predicts his passion, death, and resurrection. Peter begins to rebuke Jesus, who replies, "Get behind me Satan, you are thinking *not* as *God* does, but as human *beings* do." So what's the *difference*?

- ❖ Satan wants to remove any purpose or meaning from our pain.
  - He wants to use it to turn us *inward* so that all we can think about is how much it *hurts* and *how* we can get it to *stop*.
  - If he can get us to *blame* God for it so that we *fear* and *resent* him, all the *better*.
- ❖ On the *other* hand, *God* wants us to see that the *only* reason he allows suffering into the world and our lives is for the sake of knowing a far *greater love*.
  - It can reveal something harmful in our life and motivate us to remove it, like a rock in our shoe.

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- It can lead us to draw closer to God for comfort, in the same way that a chill in the house is what makes the heat turn on.
- It can be like the pain of exercise or rehabilitation, which strengthens and heals.

Whenever we suffer, no matter what it is, we have a *choice* in how to *receive* it:

- ❖ We can *reject* it and do everything in our power to *numb* the pain we *have* and *avoid* the pain we *don't*.
- ❖ Or we can *accept* it and view it as an opportunity to love as a *choice*, rather than a *response*; to offer ourselves *not* because of what we get *out* of it, but only for the sake of *love*

Now we need to be *sensitive* here because the painful places in our lives are holy ground. But that's *also* why I think we have to listen *deeply* to what Jesus is *saying* here, because I imagine a *lot* of people read this and think that it's the *Pharisees* that are being *reasonable*.

- ❖ How is it *merciful* to point us back to God's *original* intention for our lives, before sin had even *entered* creation, at a time when we're *intensely* aware of how *broken* the world is?
- ❖ How is it *encouraging* and *uplifting* to tell us that we have to be *perfect* as our heavenly Father is perfect, like in his sermon on the mount, when we're *struggling* with our *own* imperfections and those of *others*?
- ❖ Is Jesus just setting us up for failure? No, of course not, and his seemingly *impossible* standard gives us two important things to keep in mind:

The first is that Jesus isn't just referring *back* to a sinless creation, he's also pointing us *forward* to its *redemption*.

- ❖ The Pharisees have done what they could do, but *Jesus* is pointing to a *deeper* healing of the *heart*; the power to know and live according God's own Divine Love in a way we *never* could have otherwise.
- ❖ If we can choose to trust God out of love, there is *nothing* that cannot be healed and renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

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- ❖ Through his cross and resurrection, Jesus proves that no suffering is a dead-end, not even the grave.

The second is more *pastoral* because, after all, pain is pain. And while seeking God's greatest glory *can* make our suffering *heroic*, that *doesn't* make it *easy*.

- ❖ That's why when we're hurting, tired, frustrated, or whatever, we *have* to keep in mind how much our heavenly Father *delights* in us, even when we *struggle*.
- ❖ God knows even better than we do how *heroic* it is to *seek* him and how much *help we need*.
- ❖ Just think of the *joy* it gives him when we *trust* him enough to *try* and live lives that *demand more* than we could do on our *own*?
- ❖ Imagine how the Father's heart *swells* when we *endure* suffering and take *on* the suffering of *others* for no reason other than to *love*, and be just like *him*?

While it's not always easy, the love and joy of the Father has for us is what we have to try and keep in mind in our most difficult times.

- ❖ Take a moment now and throughout this week to think about the things for which you're most thankful and least thankful, and ask God for the grace to rejoice in both.

Let us pray.

Gracious Father, I praise you for all of the blessings and mercies you pour into our lives, and also for our struggles, failures and disappointments. I offer them all up to you with thanksgiving and ask that you make your love known to us in all of them. Give us the grace to open our hearts wide to receive them so that you can arrange them in our lives so that we might find their purpose in you. Finally, Lord, hold us when we hurt and lift us when we fall, so that we might find our way directly into your heart and give you the greatest possible glory.

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