

Parish 55th and Time and Talent Festival of Ministries

[Readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28; Psalm 25; Philippians 2:1-11; Matt. 21:28-32]

How often have we asked ourselves or others, “Why did God do this? Why is God punishing me? Why does God allow wars, hurricanes, forest fires, earthquakes, car accidents and sickness and disease or anything else that causes us to suffer? Why did I lose my job? Why am I losing my home?” Are we being punished for the sins of our ancestors, as the people asked Ezekiel in his time? It is very easy to blame God for our suffering, but the reality is that *God has nothing to do with any of the bad things that happen to us usually good people*. It is either the consequences of nature, the evil deeds of others, or our own poor choices, messed up priorities and just plain stupid mistakes.

God’s will is not that we suffer, but that we be converted. Indeed, sometimes hitting rock bottom is the only way we can rise up in God’s grace and loving care. God teaches us, through the words of Ezekiel, that “corporate guilt” -- the guilt of the many -- is important, but not as important as the moral life and choices of each individual. When we want to cry out, “The Lord’s way is not fair!” we need only look at our own individual lives and choices to find the insight and the truth that we long for.

We cannot live in solidarity and service if we are not aware that every choice we make with our time, talent and treasure has an impact on others and on our world. How can we cry the Gospel from the rooftops with our lives if we are not aware of others? St. Paul uses a small but important word in his letters: the word “if.” IF we truly turn our whole selves to Jesus and follow His lead, we must freely choose to do so. IF we want to become more complete and fulfilled in this life, we must live accordingly, turning from all else to be focused on Christ.

“IF there is any encouragement in Christ, IF there is any solace in love, IF there is any participation in the Spirit, IF there is any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.” It’s that simple! We have been doing that here at St. Martin de Porres Parish for 55 years! Living and growing in the Holy Spirit and in faith!

We continue to grow in stewardship awareness here at St. Martin de Porres. You have the chance now this weekend to take the next step. Which of the two sons in today's Gospel will we imitate: the son who says "Yes, I will help" but doesn't? Or the son who says, "No, I won't, I can't" but later does what they are called to do? Doing what the Lord is asking us, calling us to do, is a wonderful, inspiring and good start to turning our attitudes around toward God.

Jesus shows us in today's Gospel passage how believers like you and me can cultivate our relationship with the Father. We learn that even if our initial response to God's invitation is not what it should be -- "No, I won't, I can't!" -- we can change our minds and give in to God's will for us. We also learn that a verbal "Yes, sir!" to God without a lived out follow-up is no response at all.

One way to think of obedience is in terms of "listening"; in fact, "to hear" is at the root of the word *obey*. What is more, repentance, one of the themes of this week's readings, could be seen as a matter of obedience, of listening to -- and doing -- the ways of the Lord and the voice of the Church. Where do YOU do obedient listening? How do you act on it?

What sacrifices do YOU make for the good of your Christian community? How can you connect them to the Easter Mystery in which Christ "emptied himself"? What is your definition of humility? How do you practice humility?

Here in the Eucharist, we tell God many good things. We say we are sorry for our sins. We say that we believe. We offer ourselves with the gifts of bread and wine. We wish each other peace. We sacrifice time, talent, treasure.

Today, let's mean what we say we believe. Let's really offer ourselves. Let's wish each other peace from the heart. Let's show it by how we live. Come to the parish center after this Mass to our Festival of Ministries. "Come and see" how we have been a witness to life in Christ, in the work of the Church and join us in our mission to become "joyful, missionary disciples" of Jesus Christ.

Let's be responsible stewards and go out into the vineyard to do the work our heavenly Father asks of us. To paraphrase St. Anthony of Padua:

"May our words be few and may our actions speak for us." AMEN!