

(First Eucharist at 11 AM Mass, Respect Life Month begins)

[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.

Stop thinking about one’s relationship in terms of [reward and punishment](#). Instead, pursue holiness. Do what is just. When one converts, turning away from sin and death, one will live. God will not punish the sinner because of the faults of his father or mother. God seeks the conversion of the individual sinner. And yet, the presumption that God must conform himself to our thin view of “fair” or “unfair” did not disappear after the Babylonian exile.

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 58 years! Living and growing in the Holy Spirit and in faith!

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?

We are being challenged to pursue not “what’s fair,” a holiness that is “just enough” but total conversion to the living God. This means that any [false presumption](#) that we have arrived, that we have ascended to the height of holiness through our virtuous deeds is a sign that we are still wounded.

We must have the [attitude of the tax collector or the prostitute](#), aware that redemption is a total gift. God is not playing a tit-for-tat game. You do good, then

you get some good things. Rather, God wants the sacrifice of the whole heart joyfully lifted up to him.

We do not go this road alone. St. Paul hands onto us a hymn that the Church sings in the Liturgy of the Hours every Saturday night. Jesus is the God-man, who does not claim equality with God. He is not operating out of fairness but total, self-giving love. It is this love that is divine.

It is the [self-emptying love](#) of Jesus Christ that can save us from our far too thin notion of fairness. Is it fair that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us? Is it fair that the one born without sin carried the sins of the world on his back? It's not fair. But it is love. And that's the currency of the kingdom of God.

This week begins the month of October, in our Catholic tradition, Respect Life Month. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced the theme for the upcoming Respect Life Month: "Live the Gospel of Life." Celebrated in October, the event is "a time to focus on God's precious gift of human life and our responsibility to care for, protect, and defend the lives of our brothers and sisters." The bishops chose the theme to honor the 25th anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical [Evangelium Vitae](#) ("The Gospel of Life"), which Archbishop Naumann, Chair of the Right to Life Committee of the USCCB, said "masterfully articulated defense of the right to life for children in their mothers' wombs, the elderly, persons with disabilities and the marginalized is more relevant today than ever before."

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. 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!