

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Exodus 19:2-6a
<i>Response</i>	We are his people: the sheep of his flock.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5
<i>Second Reading</i>	Romans 5:6-11
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 9:36-10:8

The 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year A continues our journey through Paul's magisterial letter to the Romans. And here we go into chapter 5 of Romans looking at a short but consequential passage, from verses 6 through 11, on reconciliation with God. Here's what Paul says:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man—though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.¹

Man, this is a beautiful passage. Because in it, Paul is reflecting on the mystery of God's love, in Greek His *agape*, for humanity, even when we were in the state of sin. In other words, from all eternity, God knows everything that every human being is ever going to do. I don't know if you've thought about this in any depth, but remember, God is omniscient. He knows all things. So He sees in advance every sin you have ever committed and every sin you ever will commit. And He loves you anyway. And He sends His Son anyway. And Paul's reflecting on that

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

mystery of God's divine foreknowledge combined with His love. Because for many of us, if we saw that someone was going to sin gravely against us, if we knew that a friend or a family member would betray us, it would be hard for us to love them and do good for them, knowing in advance they were going to hurt us or harm us. So Paul goes on to illustrate this by saying, "Why one will hardly die for a righteous man, though perhaps for a good man, one will dare even die." In other words, just on a human level, most human beings might, might, be willing to lay down their life for another person, if that person's a good person. But if we know that person's a thief or a murderer or a criminal or some kind of abuser or something like that, we're not going to want to lay down our lives for them. But that's really what Christ does, according to Paul. He looks at the sea of humanity. He sees all the sin, all the filth, all the wickedness, and He loves every single one of us anyway, so much so that He lays down His life for us. He dares to die for us. And for Paul, this is this meditation on the divine foreknowledge of God is one of the most powerful revelations of just how deep that love is, for God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. All of our good works, good deeds, all of our faith, it's all in response to a love that precedes us literally by millennia all the way back into eternity. Because from all eternity, God sees and knows exactly what we're going to do and sends His Son to die for us anyway.

And for Paul, this brings great hope because he says, "Since therefore we're now justified by His blood." Remember, I talked about justification before, *dikaioō*, or *dikaioō* is the verb. It means to declare righteous, to be made righteous, since we're made righteous by His blood. How much more will we be saved by Him from the wrath of God, for if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His son? How much more now that we're already reconciled, shall we be saved by His life? There's just no reason for fear. If you're in Christ, if you've been baptized, you've already been reconciled to God. Just remain in that reconciliation. There's no need to fear. Not only so, but we also rejoice through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we've now received our reconciliation. So it shouldn't just lead us to trust, it should lead us to joy. The reconciled life is a life worth living, to adapt the phrase from Socrates, but it's also a life that should be joyful, and that's what Christ brings according to St. Paul in Romans 5. He brings the reconciled life. He enables us to live a reconciled life. In fact, elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul will actually describe his entire ministry as a ministry of reconciliation.

Just to give you an example of this. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Paul says, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of

reconciliation." That's what Paul's all about, reconciling people to God. "That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." So we're ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." There you see the transformative language of righteousness. For Paul, God just doesn't declare us to be righteous. He actually makes us righteous. He makes us holy, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

For me, this is very powerful because I think oftentimes when we talk about redemption, we talk about salvation, we'll use the language of salvation, for example. Like, "I'm saved from hell." "Saved for heaven." Beautiful, perfect. Or we'll talk about redemption, "I'm set free from sin so that I can freely choose the good, freely choose to love God." Awesome. That's a great way to describe salvation, what happens in salvation. But it's also important for us to remember that it's also a mystery of reconciliation, namely that our sin, human sin, puts us at enmity with God. It destroys our friendship with God. It damages our relationship with God so that there's a need for us to be reconciled with God. And if you've been alive, I mean, if you've made it through your teenage years, at least, you will have had the experience of a friendship or a relationship that you have a falling out, where there's a lack of reconciliation, some kind of break, there's some kind of rupture, there's a betrayal, there's some kind of hurt that takes place, so that there's no longer the friendship that was once had. And until you reconcile with that person, either because you've sinned against them or they've sinned against you, or vice versa, you can't have intimacy, you can't have joy, you can't have peace. There's dis-ease, there's rupture, there's conflict, there's pain, until there's reconciliation. You can't just go about saying, "Well, I hurt you, you hurt me, and we're just going to pretend like there is no wound there," and then move forward in the friendship. No. For a friendship to be healthy, for a relationship to be healthy, whenever there's sin that's entered into the relationship and destroyed it or damaged it, there needs to be reconciliation. There needs to be forgiveness. There needs to be repentance. I put them in the wrong order. Repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

If that's true of human relationships, then it's also true of a human relationship with God. So, no, there's no sin on God's side of the equation. But there's sin on our side. And that sin leads to a falling out, so to speak, with God. In fact, you could talk about Adam and Eve, the first sin there, sorry, the original falling out. It's like the great falling out. The fall of Adam and Eve is when they fall out of relationship

with God. They fall out of friendship with God. Before sin they walk together with Him in the cool of the evening, Genesis says, as friends. Friends stroll together and walk and talk in the evening. But once they sin, now they're hiding from God. And if you've ever had a falling out in a relationship, you know you can start hiding from one another. That's what sin does. It makes us, as St. Augustine said, "Sin is man curved in on himself." *Incarvatus in se*. And the same thing's true with our relationship with God. When sin enters into the relationship, we curve inward on ourself and we're no longer able to have friendship and intimacy with God. We tend to hide from Him. And that's not what God desires. And so what Paul's saying here is, "And God loved you enough while you were still a sinner to send His Son to die for you. How much more now that you've been reconciled with Him, shall you be saved by His life?" So as he says in 2 Corinthians 5, "Be reconciled to God." If you're in sin, be reconciled, restore that relationship. Repent, ask for forgiveness, so that friendship with God might be restored. Because that's ultimately what salvation is about. Communion with God, friendship with God, having a relationship with God. And nowhere does this happen more clearly than in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So you have lots of different names for the Sacrament. It's going to be called the Sacrament of Penance. We tend to call it the Sacrament of Confession, because that's the most uncomfortable part is confessing. But if you look at the Catechism, it's also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because of the fruit of the sacrament.

So if you're in sin, if you find yourself in a state of enmity with God, or rupture of intimacy with God, then where do you turn? Where do you go? Well, the church gives us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So I'll close with this passage from the Catechism on that Sacrament. This is what it says, 1468:

The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship."

Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, *reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation."* Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is *friendship with God*.

So let me ask you something. Do you believe in God? You'd probably say, "Yes." Do you worship God? You'd probably say, "Yes, I worship God." Are you friends

with God? Do you have an intimate friendship with God? Because according to the catechism, one of the most beautiful blessings of the life of the children of God, one of the most precious, is friendship with God. If you don't have friendship with God, then what can you do to restore that? The Sacrament of Reconciliation. Because usually if there's some damage to the relationship and friendship, it's because some sin has been committed, but it has not yet been repented for and forgiven. And that's what God gives us this sacrament for. So I just encourage you to think about it in that way. It's a powerful witness to the good news that Paul describes in Romans 5, the good news that while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.