

Living the Word: Ezekiel 18.1-4, 25-32

The prophet Ezekiel turns away from an Israelite tradition concerning the sins of the father being revisited on the son. We are reminded the God sees the lives of every single human being, and makes judgement of each according to their own actions. How often do we blame our own circumstances, upbringing or familial ties for our faults? Examination of conscience and confession remain so important partly because they help to remind us that it is we who separate ourselves from God; no-one else sins for us as individuals. And as God reminds us through the prophet, those who turn away from wickedness are saved. Absolution from a Priest is the outward sign of this continual outpouring of grace from God, who wishes the reestablishment of those good relations with us.

Elements of the Mass: Spiritual Communion

The term 'Spiritual Communion' refers simply to the desire to be united to Jesus through the Blessed Sacrament, or as St Thomas Aquinas put it beautifully: 'an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received Him.' An 'Act of Spiritual Communion' refers to any prayer expressing this desire, but especially to prayers we might use on a particular day (or indeed every day) if we are unable to be present at Mass, or if we cannot actually receive the Sacrament for some reason such as physical illness. Such prayers express our faith that God can give to those who truly desire him all the same graces he would give us if we were to make a physical act of Communion; remembering that all sacraments are 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.'

Over the centuries many prayers and devotions have been written to frame an Act of Spiritual Communion. One of the most enduringly popular and simplest is by St Alphonsus Liguori: *My Jesus, I believe that you are in the Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things, and I long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.*

1st October 2023

Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary
Time



In today's Gospel the Lord's authority is challenged. It may seem at first that Jesus responds in a rather weird way, even abruptly. He tells them that he will answer them if they can tell him where John the Baptist's baptism (and teaching) came from – heaven or from human thinking. If they answer they will either have to affirm Jesus, who John had been teaching about, or upset the people who believed John to be a great prophet. By their refusing to answer, Jesus showed that the chief priest and elders were actually ignorant and thus imposters pretending to be the leaders of the people. Not only does Jesus challenge them on this but he also follows this up with a challenge about their behaviour in the Parable of the Two Sons. It contrasts sinners who accept the message of John the Baptist with the "religious" who do not. The meaning is plain and clear. The first son, is at first reluctant to obey his father but afterwards repents and obeys. The second son, who says he would obey at first, then breaks his word and does not go. This second son represents the Scribes and Pharisees who would often repeat the Law of God but did not live it out in their deeds. As followers of Jesus, we are called to trust in his authority but also to ensure that the law written in our hearts at baptism and his teaching is not just something we pay lip service to but rather something we live out in our daily lives.

Today's Gospel: St. Matthew 21: 23-32