

Readings for the 23rd Thursday of the Year

FIRST READING: Colossians 3:12-17

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians:

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one Body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 150:1b-2, 3-4, 5-6

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise the LORD in his sanctuary, praise him in the firmament of his strength. Praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for his sovereign majesty.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise him with the blast of the trumpet, praise him with lyre and harp, Praise him with timbrel and dance, praise him with strings and pipe.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Praise him with sounding cymbals, praise him with clanging cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Alleluia.

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!

Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: "To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. "Stop judging and you will not

be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 23rd Thursday of the Year

“Put on,” Paul began today. What does that mean? People put us on when they try to deceive or trick us. We put on our clothes as we greet our day, and hopefully one another. We can act as if we are always happy. Does Paul mean to cover up our inadequacies? How can we feel heart-felt compassion when we don’t feel it? How can we bear with unbearable people? How does one put on love in a loveless world? Paul answers with what can sound glib, “Put on Christ!”

Jesus promised to remain through, with, in and among his people until “the end of the age.” We don’t actually put on Christ; we recall that Christ is part of us. He is near to the broken hearted and to sinners. We all know what it means to be broken hearted and each of us is a sinner. We need the presence of Jesus. What is the Peace of Christ? We offer it to one another at each mass. Jesus offered a peace that the world does not give. What is it? Jesus didn’t tell us but he shows us.

We can never lose the love of God. It is infinite, eternal and unconditional. As long as Jesus is part of us (until the end), God and love are nearer than the breath we take and the beating of our hearts. We live and believe in God who is love. God forgives our sin. God gives us what we need for our inadequacy. God heals our broken hearts. We can discover God in all we meet, including those we don’t like. Each human being is God’s beloved and the image and likeness of God. To seek God is not complicated. All we need do is remember. God is just a thought, person, event or experience away. To know this is what Jesus meant; his peace for troubled, doubting hearts.

Even when we know this, accept this and internalize this. We still have our human limits. We have thoughts, feelings and doubts. Paul knew this; Jesus knows this, for he was just like us in all but sin. We have faith. To live by faith is to “put on” despite our humanity the way of Christ. When we do, we will discover Jesus within. Sometimes to act in the way of Christ is to transform us in Christ as well. Fake it until we make it can be good advice. Through practice, our behavior becomes habit. If we merely act in a Christian manner, don’t we become Christ-like? We live our faith in action.

What does it mean to “praise the Lord?” Just keep saying the words? How do our lives praise him? I’ve known some nasty people who say the line always, but never seem to “toe the line.” It’s not about others; when we judge them we sin. To toe the line means, in this sense, is to walk the way of Jesus with Jesus. Paul’s message is the Word of God, Jesus. To praise the Lord is to become the people Jesus has called us to be. Mindfulness of this comes through God’s grace. Believing in Jesus is to act in faith as God’s children.

If Paul's words this morning are a challenge, and they are, Jesus words seem down right impossible. Love our enemies? Love the people of the Taliban? Love criminals? Love those we hate? Love those who hurt us? Don't judge the people we see who commit evil? Don't judge people who seek, get and perform abortion? How often do we condemn these people? For each time we do, we really condemn ourselves. We become the worst of sinners.

Why? The reason is simple. Who is the judge? God. When we observe, judge and then condemn, we assume the place of God to become an idolater. We make ourselves God. None of us wants God to damn us to everlasting torment for our sin. God seeks those who are lost; God seeks to save, not damn sinners. If God did, that would make the cross a lie. We seek God's mercy, compassion and love to forgive us. As God forgives us, God forgives every other sinner. God loves them too. Better for us to pray for them as Jesus has asked. Place them into God's loving arms and pray for God to transform them as God transforms each of us.

Jesus was a human being like us as well as God. He knew how difficult his message was and that sometime it falls on our deaf ears. His love for sinners led him to suffer and die on the cross to save the entire human race, of which there is only one. Jesus knows our weaknesses, flaws and inadequacies; he shares our nature. His love, as God, is eternal, infinite and unconditional. We can pray to share what he offers us to others who need it. Through his cross, Jesus can make up in us for what we lack through sin. People may never change, including our selves but we can see ourselves and others in a new light, the light of Christ and with new eyes, the eyes of faith which is the way Jesus sees us.

In Monday's reading, Paul said that he makes up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ with his own. In reality, Jesus makes up for what lacks in us by his suffering, death and resurrection through his cross. Because of that, to remember what Jesus has done, can help us to do what seems impossible; to love those we hate, those who hurt us and ourselves who sin too. Jesus is a mere thought away.

May we encounter Jesus in all those we meet.

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