

Readings for the 11th Thursday of the Year

FIRST READING: 2 Corinthians 11:1-11

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

Brothers and sisters: If only you would put up with a little foolishness from me! Please put up with me. For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts may be corrupted from a sincere and pure commitment to Christ. For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough. For I think that I am not in any way inferior to these "superapostles." Even if I am untrained in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. Did I make a mistake when I humbled myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the Gospel of God to you without charge? I plundered other churches by accepting from them in order to minister to you. And when I was with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way. By the truth of Christ in me, this boast of mine shall not be silenced in the regions of Achaia. And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 111:1b-2, 3-4, 7-8

Your works, O Lord, are justice and truth.

I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart in the company and assembly of the just. Great are the works of the LORD, exquisite in all their delights.

Your works, O Lord, are justice and truth.

Majesty and glory are his work, and his justice endures forever. He has won renown for his wondrous deeds; gracious and merciful is the LORD.

Your works, O Lord, are justice and truth.

The works of his hands are faithful and just; sure are all his precepts, Reliable forever and ever, wrought in truth and equity.

Your works, O Lord, are justice and truth.

Gospel: Matthew 6:7-15

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples:

"In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This is how you are to pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into

temptation, but deliver us from evil.' "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 11th Thursday of the Year

Tuesday's lesson from 2nd Corinthians was a fundraiser. What have we today? There were real problems that Paul and the community faced. There was rivalry among the evangelists. People were impressed by other people's prestige. Motives were not always clear. Money was an issue. When we have read, in the Acts of the Apostles, that the early Church was of one mind and at peace, what does this reading do to our assumptions? This sounds pretty contemporary. They weren't much different from us.

The power of the gospel is unrelated to any of these issues. What bound Paul and the community of Corinth (and Macedonia, for that matter) was the same thing that binds us as Divine Savior Parish; the love of God that saves us. Despite their troubles and ours, we still know and recognize the presence of God within, among, with and through us. That's why we all gather together for mass. "When two or three gather in my name, I am there among them," Jesus has told us. We know him in the "breaking of bread." The good news of God's saving and forgiving love is the message that drew them and draws us. These are the experiences at the heart of Paul's impassioned message then to the Corinthians and today to us. We are all united by God's infinite, eternal and unconditional love through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

My approach to the daily scriptures is a bit episodic. I write one reflection at a time and as I prepare one, I just focus on the given, daily lessons. This can pose a small problem. Sometimes my reading of scripture reminds me of other passages that are relevant. I cited today's gospel for Tuesday's reflection. We read the daily passages in a general sequence. Yesterday's gospel spanned the gap between Tuesday's and today's. Matthew, as he wrote the gospel, collected the stories of Jesus and grouped them together, thematically. As the stories unfold we can follow Matthew's train of thought as the themes develop.

So as not to repeat myself, what is at the heart of what Matthew is trying to tell us? Know what is at the heart of prayer. God is not interested in many or eloquent words. Jesus doesn't want us to put on piety like a cloak. The Holy Spirit already knows what we think, feel, need, want and know. In prayer we turn to God with our deepest of these. When we pray we reveal ourselves completely to God. It's not our method, it's not our words and rituals that God hears but what is most intimate from us.

What is our experience of prayer? Why do we have ritual, set prayers and devotions? They are the means to enter prayer. And prayer is not always what we think it to be. I am responsible to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. We used to call it the Divine Office. It consists of reading Psalms from the Old Testament, Canticles from the New, passages from the whole bible, songs and the writings of the early Church "Fathers." It is really meant to be prayed with others, at least one and aloud. I pray it alone and in silence. I prefer to pray the Liturgy with others. When I read it alone, I speed read. A few pages of prayer can take but a few minutes, over and done. Often, I have found myself not reading but seemingly far away. Those are the times of deepest prayer for me. As I have gotten older and more mature in prayer, these moments occur more often. I welcome these glimpses into the depths of God's presence.

Many people pray the rosary. Some pray in tongues. These are practices that lead to prayer, not the prayer itself. Prayer comes when we enter God's presence. Often what we think are distractions or day dreams are those moments when God raises the things about which God wants us to pray. We may remember people and events of the past. We may be thinking of things that may come. God has no need of our words; God already knows them. Prayer is God's gift to us. These moments are the gifts of prayer that come from God to us.

I define these experiences as "Mystical." I have read the autobiographies of several of the Church's mystics, Thomas Merton, Augustine, Therese, the Little Flower, Theresa of Avila and several more. They all speak of these Spirit filled moments as the center of their lives of prayer. The poetry of John of the cross is filled with imagery of God's mystical presence. Our prayers are the means for us to approach God. Prayer is when God approaches us. It is a true dialogue. God may not speak, but God brings us what God wants for our prayer.

We may think that what we offer to God is a great gift. In reality it is what God gives to us that is truly important. God has given us life, family, friends and faith. God gave us his only begotten son who, in dying, made God's life our own and in rising has given us the promises of eternal life and the Kingdom of God. God knows us through and through. It is in prayer that we come to know God.

May our day be filled with the glory of God.

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