

Homily for 20th Sunday after Trinity

One of the best known and one of my favorite television programs growing up was MASH. It followed the exploits of a group of people working at a mobile hospital during the Korean War. The show started out as a comedy but as the seasons wore on it became much deeper and tackled a lot of the human condition. One particular scene has always resonated with me. Colonel Potter is visited by his son in law, who is overseas on business. Potter discovers that his son in law has not been faithful to his daughter and is agonizing about what to do. He naturally seeks counsel with the camp priest, Father Mulcahy.

Potter walks in on Mulcahy while he is working on his sermon for Sunday. Potter advises that maybe he should skip the joke about the one legged man and the wheelbarrow and preach about “good old fashioned values and the ten commandments.” Mulcahy sees how upset he is and breaks the ice by commenting....I gather you have one in particular in mind.

Potter listens as Fr. Mulcahy offers sage advice and in the end remembers a time early on in his marriage when he did something similar. He changes his tune from one of judgement and condemnation to one of forgiveness and grace. He realizes that he too is a sinner and while he doesn't let him off the hook he gives him perspective and guidance. Our circumstances do not mitigate sin and temptation, but there is a path to salvation and repentance.

It is often said that we live in dangerous, evil times. We live in a world where we are constantly under attack from all kinds of enemies who assault us physically, intellectually and spiritually. Daily the news is filled with accounts of killing, unspeakable crimes against children and violence. Our values are assailed from within and without, protest is difficult and subjects us to retaliation. Our faith is minimized and

ridiculed, our standards belittled, and many are in physical danger because of our beliefs.

This has been the way for all time and in today's second lesson we read St. Paul's warning to the church regarding the very same concerns. To counter the world's influence, Paul counseled, "see then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. "

The word circumspect means to look about on all sides and to be wary and cautious in order to avoid enemies and danger. This kind of caution was certainly called for on the part of the early church as they were under attack by the Jews and Romans. It is equally apt advice for the world today.

St. Paul suggests that the way to achieve this level of cautious attention is to remain focused on God and to continue to attempt perfection in all things. We should be careful of our conduct and structure our lives to reflect the importance of God's rule for us and be examples for change in others.

Our own walk in life must be an example for others. Our lives must show forth the rules of life which God has given us. We cannot simply profess our faith, but we must live it. If we profess to believe but then act as the world acts, we achieve nothing but contempt. If, however we walk the walk and talk the talk our lives become a powerful example to others.

This is how we can "walk not as fools, but as wise."

Proverbs 14:16 says "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but a fool rageth and is confident."

St. Paul echoes this in his Epistle urging the church and all of us to avoid evil rather than taking part in it. We should fear evil because it endangers not only our moral lives but our immortal ones as well.

Dabbling in sin is the first step in becoming immersed in it. Sin separates us from God.

Being immersed in sin is the ultimate act of the fool, for in so doing so he throws away eternity for the benefit of the pleasure of the moment. In our world today, we have many opportunities to be immersed in sin. When we instead “redeem the time” we use the time we must spend it in the most productive way and to the best outcomes. Those outcomes are the praise and worship of God, the uplifting of others to the faith, the rejection of sin, and the doing of good works.

Our Lord declares His estimation of this kind of wisdom in Mathew 7:24

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.”

St. Paul offers his reason for this “because the days are evil.” Certainly in the times that Paul lived and penned these lines evil stood strong. Christians were in fear for their lives every hour. Today’s dangers are every bit as real and dangerous as those faced by the early Christians.

Even in the United States, a country founded on religious freedom, we find attacks on our faith from every direction. We are told to take down our symbols of faith, to not have prayer in schools or public places, and separate our daily lives from our faith. This is what the enemy would have us do.

These are dangerous times indeed. We are tempted constantly with sin and poor choices. When we are encouraged to disobey our Lord, and we must make a choice as to whether to obey man’s laws or God’s.

“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” St. Paul counsels.

That will is that we be His children, and fit in every way to be close to Him. We must endeavor to be holy and pure and devoted to Him in all ways.

In order to achieve that end, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will fill our lives with His joy, His strength, His grace and the courage to live our lives as a celebration of the love of God.

Paul goes on to caution against certain kinds of excess and dangerous living. “and be not drunk with wine, wherein in excess, but be filled with the Spirit. “ We should interact with each other, not through the fog of drugs or alcohol but through the devotion to the Body of Christ by which we are part. Paul says we should spend our time, “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When we concentrate ourselves on God and His word, and on sharing that Word with others and its effect on our lives, then we have reason to prompt us to sing songs of praise. This is not the substance fueled joy of the drunkard but the spiritual joy of the faithful. It is one of the ways we “give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thanksgiving is our natural response to our Lord as we have so much to be thankful for. It is proper and normal that we should want to give Him thanks for the many gifts, skills and benefits He was showered on us.

We do indeed live in dangerous, evil times. Thankfully, we have the greatest defender there could ever be standing by us at all times to defend us, to comfort us and to show us mercy. As long as we remain faithful to Him and His will, the very worst those dangers and evils can do is harm us here on earth. They cannot prevent us from achieving eternal life with God.

Let us pray.....

Eternal God, you more than we know the dangers that lurk in our lives. But it is through Your victory over evil and the grace you give that we can remain assured of the final victory. Help us to remain always faithful to You and Your will, to resist evil and temptation in the world and to circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. For we know it is only by Your will and Your help that we can resist evil in this world. Stand with us when we are weak and help us when we falter. We ask this in the blessed name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.