

Fr. John's Homily for July 24, 2022. 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

JMJ CHS

Last week's readings called to mind Abraham, our father in the faith. That's the way he is identified in eucharistic prayer number one. And because of that we will use Eucharistic prayer number one today.

In his homily last week, Deacon Jerry alluded to several incidents in the life of Abraham including the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. He mentioned that little interaction Abraham had with God in today's first reading. Abraham must have been a kind and compassionate guy because he was advocating on behalf of the people of those two sinful cities. God said there was nobody worth saving and Abraham did some negotiating to see if God would relent in his punishment if he could only find only a few just people. Well apparently, it didn't work because God rained down hellfire and brimstone and in doing so made the names of those two doomed cities a kind of household word throughout the ages. We always associate the names of Sodom and Gomorrah with sin, and its consequences. It is the question of mercy and justice. God's greatest attribute is His mercy. He gave it His best shot. He thus had to resort to His second greatest attribute, His justice.

The big question, however, the elephant in the living room, is the sin. What was it? There has been a certain amount of debate in this day and age about what that sin was. There are some who say it was the sin of inhospitality, that the men and boys of Sodom were "unwelcoming" towards those two visitors in the house of Lot. Well that may be one way of putting it. They were very unwelcoming. Very inhospitable. The scripture says that the mob outside the door wanted to "know" the two men. That is kind of a codeword for a specific type of immoral behavior and makes this the first condemnation in scripture of sins against chastity. It is an *abomination* in God's eyes and it even gave birth to the word *sodomy*, based on the name of the city. Up until a few years ago the act of sodomy was universally prohibited, even by civil law. Well times have changed.

It seems that all sins against chastity are now considered old-fashioned. Well, the Church is kind of old-fashioned, and so am I. And I am OK with that. And you should be, too. Now I don't know about you, but I'm not the least bit encouraged by the moral compass-heading that America, and the world, is on right now. Everybody seems to be confused. We are being pulled in different directions. There are some very articulate spokesmen on the other side who make their arguments, I will call them false teachers. But if one has not been taught well, and has a poorly formed conscience, you can find yourself being influenced by the other side. And possibly let astray, to your own destruction. It has gotten so bad in the world that many are quickly coming to the conclusion that the only thing that will save us right now is Divine intervention. A rescue. Nevertheless, I think each of us should be prepared to ask ourselves a few questions about Church teaching in the face of all of this stuff that's going on in the world.

The first question is, can I accept Church teaching? Remember the words of Jesus, "He who hears you hears me, he who hears me hears the one who sent me." And then can I defend it? And, am I willing to defend it? The opposition has gotten kind of fierce over the years and so one would necessarily have to have a little bit of courage and a thick skin in order to enter into the fray. But Jesus said, many times, "Be not afraid". But it is a touchy subject because the battle can occur under your own roof, right within your own household, between parents and their children, or for that matter between husbands

and wives. We have a very divided country right now. Nobody seems to think alike. Everybody has an opinion about right and wrong, good and evil, morality and immorality.

As for my part up here, as a teacher, I have learned to choose my words very carefully. I want to get my point across but without ruffling too many feathers - and getting too many unsigned letters under my office door. As a matter of fact, I might consider myself as practicing, up here, right now, for that day when some "big brother" will be out there with a notepad writing down or recording everything I say. Checking for my "political correctness". Because, if I say the wrong thing, I could be thrown in the clink. For things like hate speech. In other words, proclaiming the word of God. This type of thing is already happening in a foreign country not too far from here, right on the other side of the Ambassador Bridge. So, is it only a matter of time before it crosses the bridge and becomes a part of our life here in Michigan and in the U S of A? I think there are many indicators that it is really already here.

We really shouldn't limit the discussion today to sins of sexual immorality. Once upon a time scripture said, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil". I think that statement is a catchall for all kinds of sin, and I would say that sin abounds in our world. We do, in fact, have people proclaiming as good, things that are actually bad. It is indeed a sign-of-the-times and obviously it is cause for great concern because Jesus warned us that the weeds and wheat will be allowed to grow together (this morning's Gospel). In other words, we who have followed Jesus are in the world with everybody else and subject to their influence, but also subject to the chastisement and the woes that God can use to discipline and correct our troubled world.

Remember that in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as the family of Lot left, they were told not to look back on what was happening behind them to the sinful cities. One got curious, turned around to look, and suffered the consequence of being turned into a pillar of salt. Is there a lesson in there for us? I think so. We are here, we're stuck, immersed in the world. The spiritual world of our faith, but also the worldly world. And so, the lesson is: *Be in the world, but not of the world.*

We should make sure that we do not look upon the evil of this world. What can that mean? Well, how about turning off the TV. How about at least being more selective in our use of the Internet. Using a little self-discipline whenever certain rabbit holes open up on the screen. I'm talking of that old-fashioned idea of taking *custody of the eyes*. As Isaiah says, "I cover my ears lest I hear of bloodshed. I cover my eyes lest they look upon evil." Yes, this ancient advice applies more so to us than any previous generation. There is so much media out there that can influence us and confuse us. And currently we are seeing a lot of media out there on the streets, and coming to us through the mail, and over the TV and radio waves with regard to the upcoming elections. It's going to be a big one. Some very important legislative seats are up for grabs. One of the ways we can fight evil in our world is at the ballot box, exercising our right as Americans to vote for those who will lead us into the future. Make sure you do your homework and know what the issues are and who the candidates are. And what the party platforms are.

I have heard some people say that our world is now as bad as it was in Noah's time, or maybe even as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah. Are the weeds choking out the wheat? Will there be just 10 just men left? *When the Son of Man returns, will he find any faith left on earth?* Will we be saved only by Divine intervention, or do we still have a part to play? One thing I do know for sure is that we will leave this world someday, and will

have to stand before the throne of God and give an accounting for how we lived our lives. Were we chaste? Did we show a little hospitality? Did we defend Jesus, and His Church? Did we exercise our right to vote? And did we vote for God? I hope the answer to all of these questions will be.... yes.

And if the Lord should come tomorrow, I sure hope he finds at least 10 righteous souls here at Holy Spirit. Perhaps, we will qualify for a little bit of that “old-fashioned” mercy.

