

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B October 18, 2009

Readings: Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

True God and True Man

Jesus Christ is true God and true man. This is one of the basic tenets of our faith. In about ten minutes, we will all stand up and say in the Nicene Creed that Jesus is *true God from true God* and *He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man*. That Jesus is both fully human and fully divine is at the same time a very simple statement and a very profound one. Development of this concept, which we may now take for granted, was a difficult task for the Church. The early Church struggled trying to come to this understanding, and many heresies arose as different camps denied either His humanity or His divinity. But eventually, with guidance from the Holy Spirit, the Church was able to clarify the truth.

Jesus humbled Himself to become a human being, but the really good news is that He offers us a share in His divinity. As the gifts are prepared during the offertory, a short prayer is offered that states this belief as the priest or deacon adds a little water into the chalice of wine. He says: *“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”*

In our gospel passage, Jesus asked James and John: *“Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* Jesus accepted the cup that His Father willed for Him and His crucifixion was His baptism. Blood and water flowed from Christ’s side as He hung on the cross and they gave birth to the Church and made it possible for us to become His brothers and sisters, adopted sons and daughters of the Father. This is how we become divine. The Catechism quotes St. Athanasius: *“For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.”* (CCC #460)

Sharing in Christ’s divinity is something that we look forward to, but is something we can find difficult to comprehend. It is not something we do by ourselves; we only do it through the graces we receive through the sacraments, starting, of course, with the sacrament of Baptism. St. Teresa of Avila said: *“I clearly see that if we expect to please [Jesus] and receive an abundance of his grace, God desires that these graces must come to us from the hands of Christ, through his most sacred humanity, in which God takes delight.”* And the Church tells us that the sacraments are necessary for salvation. The Catechism states: *“The fruit of the sacramental life is that the Spirit of adoption makes the faithful partakers in the divine nature by uniting them in a living union with the only Son, the Savior.”* (CCC #1129) We become partakers in the divine nature by uniting ourselves with Christ. We receive the Holy Eucharist to keep us united with Christ. We receive the sacrament of Reconciliation to reunite us with Christ when our union needs strengthening and healing.

And most of the time our relationship with our brother, Jesus, needs to be strengthened and healed. I don’t know about you, but I look at my own actions and examine my conscience, and I don’t feel like I’m making very good progress at becoming divine. There are so many temptations that we face each day. And so we turn to our big brother, Jesus. We heard this morning: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable*

to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.” We look to Him as an example of how we should try to resist temptation. And look to Jesus for mercy because He understands the power of temptation and also our weaknesses.

Often we tend to judge others who fail to resist temptation. But it’s usually when they fail to resist a temptation that we ourselves do not experience. It’s easy not to commit a particular sin if we are not tempted to it. Someone who doesn’t like cookies and candy is more likely to judge someone with a sweet tooth who has a difficult time controlling his desires and falls into the sin of gluttony. Someone who doesn’t like beer or wine is more likely to judge the one who occasionally has too much to drink. Someone with a low libido is more likely to judge someone with naturally high testosterone levels who struggles to control his or her sexual urges. Someone with sexual desires in line with natural law is the quickest to judge those with homosexual inclinations. And that’s why it is important to remember the old adage about hating the sin but loving the sinner. We can determine that certain acts are against God’s will, but we can’t judge those that commit those acts, especially those acts to which we are not tempted at all. It is easy not to sin if we are not tempted.

But Jesus knows how we are tempted. He is more understanding toward us than we are to each other. He wants us to do good things and avoid bad things, but He is willing to offer His forgiveness and mercy when we fail and repent. What we need to do is to trust in God’s forgiveness and mercy, we need to ask for God’s forgiveness and mercy, and we must be willing to offer forgiveness and mercy to others.

The devil most aggressively tempts those that will be his biggest prizes if they fail. This is why our priests are tempted so greatly, and why we need to pray for them. The devil knows the destructive power of clergy scandals. We are hurt when we find out that a deacon or a priest or a bishop has committed some very public sin, but we must not judge them. We cannot understand the level of temptation they experience. And we should not judge one another either. We are all tempted in different ways, and only God understands our hearts and our struggles. He loves all of us despite our failings and we need to try to do the same. Jesus tells us to love one another as He has loved us.

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