

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Hosea 6:3-6

The name Hosea means “salvation”. He was a prophet in the northern kingdom and prophesied to that kingdom from the later years of the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (783-743 B.C.) until just before the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. He was married to Gomer who bore him three children. From Hosea’s own writing we know that she was an unfaithful wife. There is disagreement among the scholars as to whether she was a temple prostitute or simply a woman whose unfaithfulness was found out after the marriage. In any case, Hosea used his personal circumstances as a vehicle for proclaiming his prophetic message: he compared Israel to an adulterous woman and Yahweh to the ever-loving and patient forgiving husband. Yahweh, who contracted marriage with Israel, has discovered her to be unfaithful and feels the natural jealousy of a wounded spouse. Despite her unfaithfulness He still loves His wife. Even though He does at times punish her, His only purpose in doing so is to bring her back to Himself: He is merciful and desires that she mend her ways and experience once again the delight of their first love.

Our first reading today comes from a much longer section of Hosea (5:15-7:2) which has been called by the commentators a lesson on false repentance. The transgressions of Israel have become so numerous that the people seem to have forgotten how to repent. Even their vast number of sacrificial offerings fall short of the mark because the people are lacking the one thing which is basic to any sincere repentance; knowledge of the One whom they have offended – God. If they truly loved God, they would have had a sincere love for Him which would be shown in a humble recognition of their personal sin. If they recognized and rejected their personal sin, they would have a renewed dedication to their covenant with Him. What we hear is a dialog with Israel speaking in the first verse and Yahweh responding in the remainder of the reading.

³ Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD; as certain as the dawn is his coming, and his judgment shines forth like the light of day! He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth.”

The ancient fertility cults of Canaan worshiped as Baals the sun and the rain gods but the God of Israel is the one God who provides it all. The Israelites have likened God to the Baals of Canaan.

⁴ What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah?

The tribe of Ephraim was perhaps the largest of the tribes of Israel and this position

resulted in the common use of the name as a poetic designation of the northern kingdom by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. Judah, likewise, was the largest of the two tribes which comprised the southern kingdom, and in fact, the southern kingdom was known as the kingdom of Judah.

Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away. ⁵ For this reason I smote them through the prophets, I slew them by the words of my mouth; ⁶ For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

This isn't a rejection of the sacrificial system. In fact, in Hosea 9:4 he calls deprivation of sacrifice a punishment (the loss of a good thing). The people have put their faith in the offering of the sacrifice rather than in the love and sincere repentance which motivates the desire to sacrifice. A Christian parallel would be a person who goes to the sacrament of reconciliation out of habit rather than sincere repentance and a desire to change their ways.

2nd Reading - Romans 4:18-25

All of chapter four of Paul's letter to the church in Rome draws from the Old Testament (scriptures which would be very familiar to the converted Jews) to show that justification is achieved through faith and that this justification was operative long before the Jews received the Law at Mount Sinai. In fact, justification by faith not only predates the receipt of the law, but actually confirms it. As an example, Saint Paul uses Abraham who was pronounced just by God because of his faith (Romans 4:1-8) and not because of his circumcision (Romans 4:9-12) or the Law which had not been received yet (Romans 13-17). Abraham serves as a prime example of the true believer; one who not only took God into his heart, but allowed Him to be shown in the obedience which Abraham showed as he lived out his life.

¹⁸ He [Abraham] believed, hoping against hope, that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "Thus shall your descendants be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body as (already) dead (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the dead womb of Sarah.

The name "Abraham", a name which had been given to him by God, means "the father of many nations". Prior to this name change he had been known as "Abram" which means "father who is exalted". The name change came about in Genesis 17:5 when Abram was 99 years old, childless, and married to a barren wife who was fast approaching the age of 90. Hardly what one would call a prime candidate to become the father of many nations, but this is what God has promised (Genesis 17:6-8).

"As always, when the apostle Paul talks about faith, he adds hope as well, and rightly so, for hope and faith are inseparable. ... Just as Abraham believed against hope, so all believers do

the same, for we all believe in the resurrection of the dead and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21; 22:31; Luke 14:13-14, John 5:28-29; 1 Peter 1:5). These appear to go against hope as far as human nature is concerned, but when we take the power of God into consideration, there is no problem.” [Origen (ca. A.D. 244), *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*]

²⁰ He did not doubt God’s promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God ²¹ and was fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to do.

After initially falling on his face in a bout of laughter at the news (Genesis 17:17), Abraham took God at His word and believed that God would do what He had promised. A year later, Isaac (means “laughter”) arrived, “born of a promise” (Galatians 4:23). Immediately after the promise and prior to the conception of Isaac, Abraham’s faith had been tested; he was circumcised. Again, Paul’s use of “faith” in Romans is not just believing, but being obedient to that faith and doing everything which God commands: the same type of faith which Abraham has demonstrated. A faith which is not just mouthed, but lived.

²² That is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Genesis 15:6. This is where God had first promised Abraham many offspring. Being credited as righteous is different from is implied in the King James Version which says that it was “imputed” to him as righteousness. The correct translation is credited; imputation infers that although Abraham wasn’t worthy, God gave it to him anyway. Having righteousness credited means that Abraham actually lived the righteous life of one who follows God.

²³ But it was not for him alone that it was written that “it was credited to him”; ²⁴ it was also for us, to whom it will be credited, who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification.

Just as God had used Abraham (and Sarah’s) “dead” bodies to yield to God’s power and bring about life, Jesus shows us through His resurrection that we too have a hope of everlasting life. Jesus has showed us the way and we too will be credited with righteousness if we will live out our faith. Righteousness will not be imputed, but it will be credited to us if we are worthy.

“Paul says that in Abraham a model was given to both Jews and Gentiles, so that by his example we might believe in God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and that it might be reckoned to us as righteousness.” [The Ambrosiaster (A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles* Romans 4,23]

Gospel - Matthew 9:9-13

We are early in the public life of Jesus, He is still gathering the twelve. Today we hear of the calling of Matthew himself. This gospel account is unique in that it identifies the tax collector as Matthew; the other synoptic gospels call him Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Matthew is identified as one of the twelve in the lists of the apostles (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). All this aside, tax collectors were considered by the Pharisees to be among those who did not keep the law. In many cases they are likened to sinners in general. Tax collectors were hired by Rome to collect the variety of taxes which the empire imposed and they were local people (Jews in the Holy Land) who had bid for and won the option of collecting from their neighbors. The Roman way of collecting taxes was somewhat unique; they got payment in advance from the tax collectors who then hired agents to assist them in recouping their initial outlay and in making a handsome profit besides. Extortion was not uncommon.

The Pharisees in today's reading can be likened to Israel in our first reading; they have placed their faith in the Law rather than in the love of God. Unlike Abraham in our second reading whose righteousness was the fruit of his belief in God, the Pharisees self-righteousness has hindered their ability to see God at work in Jesus.

9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Like Abraham, who followed God from the age of 75 when God told him to uproot his family and go to a place which God will show him, Abraham responds immediately to the call from Jesus. There is no hesitation about becoming a follower. A "follower" of Jesus is one who literally walked in His footsteps and obediently did all that was asked of him, whether he understood it or not.

10 While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples.

The "sinners" were unobservant Jews, not Gentiles.

11 The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Pharisaic Judaism held strictly to the principle of avoiding contact with Gentiles and Jews who did not observe the Law; these were the social outcasts of the community and no rabbi could afford to be seen with such as the likes of them. The Pharisees may simply be surprised that Jesus would be seen with this sort of person, rather than expressing hostility.

12 He heard this and said, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. 13 Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Jesus responds to their snobbish remark with a quotation from our first reading (Hosea 6:6). Human relations are more important than cultic worship. Mere observance of the Law is an external form of living life and it is the interior disposition which is important. Those who do not recognize their illness will not summon the physician nor will they receive him; they are beyond healing. No one can approach Jesus unless he confesses that he is a sinner and the faith that heals demands repentance.

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