

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A CYCLE, OCTOBER 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2017 [SUNY ALBANY]

**First Reading:** Ezekiel 18:25-28 (Turn away from sin and you will live)

**Responsorial Psalm** 25 "Remember your mercies, O Lord."

**Second Reading:** Philippians 2:1-11 (Have in you the same attitude that Christ has)

**Alleluia Verse:** "My sheep hear my voice, says the Lord; I know them and they follow me."

**Gospel:** Matthew 21:38-32 (Tax collectors & prostitutes are entering the kingdom before you )

*♪♪ This is my song, O God of all the nations, A song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my heart is; Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.  
But other hearts in other lands are beating With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine. ♪♪*

We sang that song in July at the wedding Mass of two people only a few years older than most of you. They are both enlisted in the Army & play in the US Army Ceremonial Band and the US Army Field Band. They asked for that hymn. The lyrics reflect the values Jesus taught and point to a healing path in our age where conflict with other nations & racial tension at home are all too common.

On Friday, I received my copy of a local newspaper, The Mountain Eagle and the Schoharie News. It's for the county I live in & the Catskills to the South. There was an insert called *The State Times*. It's the school newspaper for SUNY Oneonta. I was reading an article on the Sports Page,

*"This Sunday, the NFL wasn't all about the events on the field... Ever since Colin Kaepernick went down to one knee during the National Anthem ...to protest social injustice in the US, more and more players have joined him in protesting many things that are currently going on in this country."*

I have been following the unfolding news about this issue & struggling to understand both sides. I have listened to commentators on ESPN & on the evening news. I have heard players and politicians on both sides claim that they are **absolutely** right about their stand, & slinging tweets & facebook posts condemning the other side. Clearly, there is pain on both sides & truth to be heard from either camp.

While on vacation, Sr. Anna & I visited a place in Westport, NY near Lk Champlain called *Crooked Brook Studios*. Ted Cornell, the artist who lives there creates outdoor sculptures from old farm implements & structures. There is one called: "*The Angel of Inerrancy, conveying well meaning souls to hell.*"



As I looked at it, & meditated on its shape and the words that described it, I realized that **absolute** certainty - another word for inerrancy - is really an illusion.

I see the ones who are so absolutely certain about their opinions, whatever they are, & are quick to condemn those who differ from them as following what my artist friend calls "The angel of inerrancy." I hear the opposite path in both the 1<sup>st</sup> reading and the Gospel - where the possibility of change and growth is described.

When I am so certain I am right that I can't listen to someone who has a different perspective or opinion, I am following the angel of inerrancy. When I am so afraid that I am not absolutely right that I condemn anyone with another view of the issue, I am worshipping the false god of certainty.

The Gospel truth is expressed in another song:

[Anna] There is a **children's story** of **transformation** that I love – **BEAUTY & THE BEAST**

In the song in the Disney version the mother is explaining to her young son the **change/transformation** in the **BEAST** -

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♪ Tale as old as time, —true as it can be. Barely even friends, —then somebody bends —unexpectedly.

Just a little change. —Small to say the least.

Both a little scared, —neither one prepared. BEAUTY & the BEAST.

Tale as old as time, Tune as old as song, Bitter-sweet and strange,

Finding you can change Learning you were wrong, ♪

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[Peter] I am not a big Dallas Cowboy fan - my favorite team is the Buffalo Bills - but the way they began last week's game seems to me to put the issue around the National Anthem in perspective & to contribute to unity and healing.

The players, coaches and the owner came on the field and knelt down on one knee before the National Anthem. Then they stood and locked arms -- while the Anthem was being played. They had talked with each other & decided not to insist only on their own interests & opinions, but to listen to those who had different opinions & to find common ground.

They did not hold on to their fears & realized that their opposing positions were not absolute and incapable of being adjusted. Their behavior reflected the reading from Philipians, "Look to others' interests rather than your own."

When I remembered that scene, I thought of the 1<sup>st</sup> reading & Gospel for today. In the 1st reading, the prophet Ezekiel reminds us that none of us is so absolutely right that there is no room for change, & none of us is so absolutely wrong that we cannot change and turn to the truth. None of us is an absolute beauty, & none of us is an absolute beast & there is always a chance to change & grow.

This is also true of society. Jesus, by his words and actions, teaches that it's not either the way of patriotism **or** the way of racial justice, it is both - in relationship to each other. The song I began with celebrates the best version of the life of a nation - a patriotic love that includes justice & harmony as well as commitment to the best ideals of our country, while honoring the hopes and dreams of other nations as well.

In the Gospel, I can see myself in the first son at times. I can be afraid to risk going against injustice in a public way, knowing that I will be criticized or opposed. But, with the help of the grace of the Spirit, I have usually been able to discern God's will & to follow it in the end. I see the first son in Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther King and the father of Malala Yousafzai. They hesitated at first, but went forward in spite of the resistance and violence of the ones whose consciences they challenged.

I can also see myself in the 2<sup>nd</sup> son. He talked a good game, but did not really have faith. I can forget what I promise to do, or promise more than I can give. I can be so certain that I am right that I forget about the people who will be hurt by my choices. He did not embarrass his father by open rebellion, but he did not do what his father asked him to do.

I see this pattern at work when bureaucrats, politicians & corporate executives make promises they don't keep & spin the situation for their own advantage. All talk & little effective action. All puff and no stuff.

I remember what one of my teachers used to say, *"It is more important to love than to be right."* And it is more important to discern & follow the will of God than to keep insisting that my way is the only way. Those who put nationalism or loyalty above patriotism and justice & refuse to see the flaws and sins of their own country or their own church are not doing what the Father asks.

Jesus did not ask which son did not embarrass his father, or which one behaved more honorably, he asked which one *did* the will of the father.

I believe that the same thing can happen even among disciples of Christ. There are men and women who call themselves Christian and claim to do the will of their Lord, but do not practice what Jesus preaches. They are often very certain that they are right, but they are not living the Gospel of Christ when they persecute gay, lesbian or transgendered persons, or when they ignore the needs of the poor and reject immigrants who are exiles from their own land, while conveniently forgetting that most Americans - including me - can themselves trace their ancestry to people who were immigrants.

We can fight racism and terrorism & avoid the hypocrisy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> son by practicing what our Lord preaches & always being ready to seek *his* will, even when it means we have to change our minds & attitudes.

The bottom line is that we are sent to **do** the will of the Father. We are sent to make the kingdom of justice, love and peace more real in our own time and place. We are sent to change what needs to be changed & let go of needing absolute certainty or blind loyalty to human institutions. We are sent to find common ground; to love one another, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to be ministers of reconciliation and healing.

We are sent on mission to extend the Eucharist we celebrate today to the whole week by our prayer, our love and our commitment to life and peace in our dorms or apartments, in our families, in the classroom and in all our relationships. We are sent to glorify the Lord with our lives.

*♪♪ This is my prayer, O lord of all earth's kingdoms: Thy kingdom come; on earth thy will be done. Let Christ be lifted up till all shall serve him, And hearts united learn to live as one. O hear my prayer, thou God of all the nations; Myself I give thee; let thy will be done. ♪♪*

