

September 30, 2018

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

I've always been intrigued by the gospel reading for today. It's a little different from some of the other gospels. In this one in Mark, Jesus says if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. Because it's better to enter the kingdom of God lame, then it is to go to hell with both hands. Same with the feet and with the eye. In one of the other gospels, if your hand causes you to sin... it's just a translation difference between the two. What Jesus is really talking about is whatever causes you to sin, that is what you need to remove from your life. We've heard Jesus say before that there's nothing outside of the body going into it that can cause sin. It's what comes out of the body.

So, whenever I read this Gospel reading, I think, well it's never the hand or the foot or the eye that really causes us to sin. It may be that through which we do sin. But the cause is something deeper. The cause is something that comes up from within. And so, when I was looking at the reading again, I finally had to stop and ask. "Well Greg what causes you to sin?" I think that's a question that we really need to ask ourselves. Certainly, one in the season of Lent where we try to do a self-examination for those 40 days of Lent. Well what causes me to sin? What separates me from God? What is a part of my life that leads me not closer to God, but away from God? Because isn't that really the definition of sin. What is it that separates us from God? And it's not ever the hand, and it's not ever the foot, and it's not ever the eye. Although all those can be used to permit the sin.

But what causes you to sin? What causes you to sin? that's not always a real easy question to answer. Mostly because we don't like to think of ourselves as sinners. We like to distance ourselves from sin as much as possible. We want to think that yes, Jesus died for my sins but luckily, they weren't terrible sins. they weren't things that God spoke to people about early in the ten commandments. Although all of us are guilty for breaking the first commandment. It's the others we like to focus on. We can say

pretty much well I don't do that. Thou shalt not steal. Okay I don't steal. Thou shalt not commit murder. Okay I'm good on that one. I haven't done that one. Thou shalt not commit adultery. I'm not going to say anything about that. I don't want any responses to that.

What is it that causes us to send? What is it that leads us away from God? The reason I said that all of us have broken the first commandment is because you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself is the other commandment and how the other commandment is grouped together. Love God. Love your neighbor. All of us commit idolatry. All of us at one point or another put something in the place of God.

And so, when I was asking myself what is it that that causes me to send? What is it that causes us to sin? I came down to two things that may sound a little strange at first. But let me explain. First is fear. And most of us probably agree with that. You know we hear in the scriptures more than any other phrase don't be afraid. And we hear it when Moses is confronted with the burning bush. Don't be afraid. We hear it when the disciples are confronted with the risen Lord for the very first time. Don't be afraid. Because fear causes us to turn and look at different things. Fear causes us to not respond to the love of God. And makes us even question and mistrust God.

Fear comes into every person's life because we're not sure there's going to be enough. We're afraid that there's not going to be enough blessing in our lives to buy everything that we think we need or deserve. Fear comes into our lives when we are put into situations where we can speak the gospel of Jesus Christ to a situation. And to bring the love of God to a situation and we are uncomfortable. we want someone else that is better suited to do that. I'm afraid to do the wrong thing. I'm afraid to step into the situation and not provide what is necessary. I am afraid. We don't always say that out loud. we don't always say that even in our minds. But every time we say God is calling for someone to be there, send someone else. it's because of fear. Fear that we're not enough. Fear that God won't make us enough.

I understand that fear. it's been a part of me and my life as a priest the whole time I've been ordained. I'm not sure I'm enough. Why didn't you send this person instead of to my office someplace else to look for an answer? Because I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to give them that

answer. Or know the answer. Or be able to persuade the person that they need to go this way. or to believe that they've been forgiven. I don't know how many times I've been put into positions where I felt inadequate. The very blessing of God is that sometimes when you are put into the situation, and even though you're afraid, you don't have an escape route. You must deal with it. And lo and behold, God is present there. And the words that you speak are not your own. And you can be a help. But if we have that escape route, if we have that way out, sometimes fear leads us to take that route. to leave it for somebody else. Or to leave that person in darkness when we have been asked to provide the light.

And I believe that's sin. I believe that's where we turn away from God. That's where we are not trusting in God. Not loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Because if we did than we would believe and trust that God has placed us there. Not just to make us uncomfortable, but God is going to use us as a vessel to speak the gospel. To share the love of God with someone who desperately needs it. And we are called on not to be afraid. To just give of ourselves. Allow God to use us. And even though we may come out of the situation feeling like I didn't do what needed to be done. God takes what we offer and makes it enough. We're never quite sure the words that we speak, how the person hears them and receives them. It may be exactly what they need to hear. It may be exactly the presence that they need in their lives at that moment. So that they can get up and go out and face the world for another day. Or that they might have a direction in which they can now go. And understand that it is God who has put them on that path. We are called not to be afraid. For fear causes sin.

The other thing that I think, and this one you may not agree with, but give me a moment. And that's love. We often think that love is the greatest thing. That's what God calls us to, right? He calls us to love. Love God and love one another. What Jesus also said is, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Anytime love is misdirected, it becomes an obsession. When we put the object of our desire that we've labeled love in the place of God, that is a great sin of idolatry. That is the great sin that we're all guilty of in one way or another, to one extent or another. We need to make sure that what we love, the object of our adoration, the object of our giving and loving is the right object. That is God first and foremost. To put God first and then to be able to put everything else in our lives in its proper perspective. Including the people that we love.

Too many times people put their jobs, and the love of their jobs, and what they think is important as the priority of their life. And their family suffers. Sometimes the love of our lives, that significant other becomes an object of our desire, rather than the one that we get in a relationship with that is mutual, that is giving and receiving. They become again an obsession. or someone comes into our lives when we're already in a relationship. And we feel something that we label as love and we put all our energy and attention in that direction. neglecting those who are part of our lives that we have made promises to. Love is a wonderful thing. It is the very nature of God, but it must be directed to God in right relationships with other people.

They often say in our generation and other generations, we've learned to love things and use people. Where we're really called to love people and use things. So, when we put something and someone, some love obsessive-compulsive, however you want to put it so that it begins to take the place of God. So that we think that God can be moved over to the side or ignored. That's sin. That's where we go wrong. That's where the other parts of our lives begin to fall apart. We think it's good. A deep love is a wonderful thing, properly directed. Put in its proper terms of relationship of offering and receiving. And all these things come from within. All these things come from what we believe. And where we place our faith. If we place our faith first and foremost into God, then everything else takes its proper place in our lives. And then we can love God first. And we can see others as brothers and sisters, as children of God. Then we put our relationships in the right order. We can offer ourselves to one another and to receive from one another with trust, with caring, with love. It is easier to not be afraid when we trust that God loves us and provides for us. And that God provides enough for us and always will. Not always what we think we want, need, or deserve, but always what God knows that we need. What causes you to stumble? What causes you to sin? It's a question that each person can only answer for themselves. But I think if we look at those two areas. What am I afraid of above all else? We begin to have a sense of where our sin lies and what needs to be cast away.

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