

26th Sunday OT - (Year A) – October 1, 2017

EZ 18:25-28; PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; PHIL 2:1-11; MT 21:28-32

The **longest** word in the English language—at least one that appears in a *major dictionary*—is *45 letters long*—and comes from the **medical field**. It is:

pneumo noultra microscopic silico volcano coniosis

This word is the name for a *lung disease caused by inhaling silica or quartz dust*.

The **second-longest** word in the English language—a word containing *33 letters*—is spoken or sung during **Sunday Mass in the Catholic Church**. It is:

one-holy-catholic-and-apostolic-church

This word describes the **four attributes** that reveal the **true Church founded by Jesus Christ**. This “word” is often rattled off rapidly by Catholics, who usually say it in their **sleep...while standing up** at Mass...**after** the homily.

Let’s hear it spoken **slowly**, because, that way, you’ll actually *recognize* it.

One Holy Catholic ...and Apostolic Church

These words are part of the **Creed**—the summation of our Catholic faith which we profess at Solemn Masses. But the *mindless recitation of these important words* helps us to better understand the danger the **Prophet Isaiah** spoke of when he said:

...this people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me... (Isa 29:13)

To pay mere **lip service** to our Catholic faith—by **word** or by **action**—makes us just like the **second** of the **two sons** in Jesus’ parable from the **Gospel of Matthew**:

A man had two sons. He came to the first and said, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ He said in reply, ‘I will not,’ but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The man came to the other son and gave the same order. He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go. (Mt 21:28-30)

The **first son denied** his father with his **words** but eventually came around to his father's *will*. The **second son** gave the outward **impression of obedience**, initially, but chose to go *his own way* instead.

Reciting the **Creed** mindlessly, and then *living our daily life disconnected from what we profess*, is like saying, “**Yes sir**” to God with our **words**, and then going our own way with our *will*. To choose a way contrary to **God's** way—to exercise our will contrary to God's *will*—is the very meaning of *sin*.

A person who gives the mere *appearance of piety*, may fool their fellow **parishioners**. They may fool their **priest**. They may even fool *themselves*. But they can't fool **God**, because, as **St. Paul** wrote to the **Galatians**:

God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (Gal 6:7)

That's why, in our **1st Reading** today, God said—through the **Prophet Ezekiel**:

When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. But if he turns from the wickedness he has committed, and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (Ez 18:26-28)

These are frightening words, or at least they *should* be.

A person who has lived close to God **can** fall away from God...if he or she chooses. This is the Catholic who may have lived a good Catholics life for years—or at least **appeared** to—but who suddenly “**goes off the rails**” and abandons God's way for a life of grave sin.

Likewise, a person who has lived very far from God **can** find the way back to life through God's mercy...if he or she chooses. This is the person who may have lived most of their life **mired in serious sin** but who can no longer tolerate a **heart devoid of love** and a **life devoid of meaning**...so they turn back to God.

The words of Ezekiel go against the **popular Protestant doctrine** of *eternal security* which is just another way of saying “**once saved, always saved**”. I say,

“**Protestant doctrine**” because the Protestants *coined* it. but the fact is, many Catholics *live* by it. It sounds more like *this* when Catholics live by it:

“I have my Sacraments...and I’m a good person, so, of course, I’m going to heaven.”

From the “**once saved, always saved**” perspective, once you accept Jesus as your savior—either by the “**sinner’s prayer**” or by the **Sacraments**—you can’t lose your salvation no matter what you do because...well...you’ve been **saved!**

This “**one-and-done**” view is not only **unrealistic**. It’s also extremely *dangerous*.

Why?

Because we can easily convince **ourselves** and *others* that we are friends with God, while *barreling down a road that takes us away from him*. We can get so accustomed to believing in our own holiness—**based on the way others see us or how we see ourselves**—that we become blind to our constant need for God’s mercy.

This is what happened to the religious leaders in Jesus’ time. They started **believing their own press** and **relishing their reputation** to the point that they considered themselves to be **above reproach**. When it was brought to their attention that they—*just like any other sinner*—needed to repent, they rejected the warning. Jesus said so when he told them:

Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. When John [the Baptist] came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him. (Mt 21:31-32)

Salvation is not a single transaction...because God is not a vending machine!

God is a **Father**—*Our* Father—and he is both **just** and **merciful**.

He is *just* in that he will give us exactly what our choices **at this moment in our lives** indicate that we want.

He is *merciful* in that, as soon as we realize we have strayed from him and come back to him with a **sincerely repentant heart**, he will take us back.

This is all summed up beautifully in **Psalm 34**:

Turn aside from evil and do good...The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth. The Lord turns his eyes to the just and his ears to their appeal. (Ps 34:15-17)

Jesus's told his parable to show the respected religious leaders that, insofar as their **piety** was a *performance* and not *a genuine orientation of the heart* toward God, they risked losing their place in heaven. In Jesus time, the religious leaders were looked up to by the people as **models of holiness**. They would be like the **respected leaders in a parish today** who are quite often looked at **by others** as holy, simply because they're **visible** to those who *don't* get involved in their parish.

A Catholic faith lived for **appearances only** and devoid of *substance* might make us feel good about *what others think of us*, but it leaves our **hearts empty** and our **lives aimless**. Other people may not see or know this. In fact, *we* may not even realize it. But if we **slow down** and **quiet** ourselves long enough to let reality set in, we will come face-to-face with the **meaningless void** that a human life becomes when it's disconnected from God.

The fear of facing this reality is the reason that so many people fill their lives with noise and distractions, so they won't have to deal with the emptiness in their hearts.

When the **reality of God** is *unreal* to us in our daily life—we don't know who **God** is...and we don't know who *we* are.

This is the easiest thing in the world to demonstrate.

The percentage of our population that calls itself "**atheist**" is rising at an alarming rate. And yet, most people **still** act surprised that things are falling apart around us at a faster rate than anyone would have thought imaginable...even ten years ago.

Common sense has been replaced by *nonsense*. **Common courtesy** has been replaced by **competition** to get "**what I want**". Disconnection from **truth** has

disconnected us from **each other** because without an objective basis for what is true, *we can't talk to each other*. Disagreement is interpreted as **hate**—if you don't **think** like me, then you must *hate* me.

Religion has been replaced by **politics**—with more people focused on **Fox News** or **NPR News** than the **Good News**.

The **tabernacle** has been replaced by the *television!*

And the greatest reversal of all—God has been replaced by “**self**”—where the great “**I AM**”—*the name God gave himself* when he revealed himself to **Moses**—has been replaced by “**I identify as**”—which is how we **try** to reveal ourselves to the world *when we have no idea who we really are*.

What does all this have to do with paying mere **lip service** to our Faith—saying one thing, and living another? Well, if we **don't** know who God is, we *can't* know who we are, because we won't know **where we came from...what our life is for...and where—and with whom—we are intended to spend “forever”** when this brief life of ours ends.

Jesus said to the self-righteous people of his time:

“...tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you”.

This is another thing that's easy to demonstrate.

If you come into **this** Church at odd hours—**mid-afternoon or late at night**—it's not uncommon to see people who, **at least from outward appearance**, seem to have lived a hard life, sitting or kneeling in this Church with tears running down their face.

Whereas on Sunday, you're more likely to see the **well-dressed** at Mass; during “**off-hours**”, you're more likely to see the **dis-tressed** having a heart-to-heart with God about their desperate situation.

People who don't have the luxury of filling their lives with constant distraction are more inclined to have to face the reality of a life lived without God. Having lived a desperate life of sin and suffering, they come face-to-face with their **need** for

God...so they often end up **turning** to God. And having failed to find him in **sex**, **drugs** and the **street life**, they wander in here to be embraced by God the Father, just as the Prodigal Son's dad embraced his **lost-and-found boy**.

That's why tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before the self-righteous!

Our **Psalm** today proclaims:

Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way. (Ps 25:8-9)

If we want to know who these **sinner**s are we need not look **around** us.

We need only look in the **mirror**.

And if we want to know the **way** back to God, we need not go searching the **world** for the path home.

We need only look to his Son—Jesus.