

Reflection for 9/21/08
Saint Dominic's Parish
The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

It is an honor to be a part of the tradition here at Saint Dominic's of having their seminarian interns give a reflection on the readings at the beginning of their internship. I hope to one day be at the experience level of Deacons Sean and Luke but I need to ask you to be patient with me as this is the first time I am giving a reflection of this length. Today I would like to share with you some of my thoughts on today's readings and tell you a little more about myself.



Kevin Mc Manaman

In the seminary, I am known for my love of movies and books because I often allude to them while giving short evening prayer reflections. When I was meditating on today's first reading, I thought of a dialogue from Lord of the Rings. I consider the Lord of the Rings, particularly the book, with its themes of faith, community, virtue, and hope to be great Christian fantasy. In this particular dialogue, the main character, Frodo, is lamenting to the wizard Gandalf about why his uncle did not give justice to the creature Gollum. Gandalf is taken aback by Frodo's statement and gently chides him, telling him that "even the wisest cannot see all ends." From this dialogue one can tell that Frodo believes that Gollum deserves to have justice be done upon him because he considers him evil. Yet, as Gandalf points out, Frodo assumes that he knows the course of future events and that no person, hobbit, wizard or any other creature can have full understanding of the future.

I thought of this dialogue because it seems to exemplify today's readings. In the reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet is reminding the Israelites that human thoughts and ways are not God's thoughts and ways. Since God's wisdom and will are infinitely higher than human wisdom, people cannot fully grasp what God intends in the world. This is why God's wisdom and will always remain, at least in part, a mystery. This mystery in our lives can be even more confusing because we are all created by God in His own image and likeness and possess a spark of God's wisdom and we can come to know some of God's will. Also, God has chosen to reveal Himself through His son Jesus and this adds to our knowledge of God's ways in the world through divine revelation. But even with this spark and God's revelation through His son, God's wisdom and will remain His and not ours.

The prophet Isaiah's reminder prepares us to consider today's gospel reading. The Lord Jesus uses a parable to illustrate this distance between God and people in a clearer way. In this parable we are told of an owner of a vineyard. Naturally, he is unable to do all of the work, so he begins to hire workers. For reasons not given, he hires more workers as the day wears on. When the end of the day arrives and it comes time to pay all of the workers he gives all of them the same full day's wage. Those who put in a full day of work feel that it is unjust for those who worked only a little to receive the same wages as those who worked all day. However, the landowner reminds the workers that he can pay his workers any wage he feels is just.

Through His parable, Jesus is telling us that the will and generosity of God is beyond human conception. We are given no other reason for what the landowner did except that he can choose to do what he wants. The workers who felt cheated could not understand this kind of generosity. I think this parable suggests that, like God's will, the reasons for God's generosity cannot always be known to us at that moment. This often leaves us to question why God would show another person generosity but not you or me. Or perhaps, when we benefit from God's generosity we feel unworthy, for whatever reason and cannot understand why it is given to us.

This mystery of God's will and generosity can be very disturbing and confusing at times. In some ways, the entire relationship between Jesus and His disciples and apostles in the Gospels is characterized by people trying to understand God's generosity and will. We need only think of Saint Peter and his numerous misunderstandings about Jesus and what he intends.

I can tell you that I have experienced both God's generosity and the mystery of God's will in my life. I wish I could stand up here and tell you that I have always been faithful to the God, but I haven't. I wish I could say that I have always striven to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be a true disciple of Christ, but I haven't. I wish I could say that I had an easy road into the seminary, but I didn't. Let me tell you a little about my journey. I am a native of Cudahy. I was baptized Catholic and received first communion. However, by the time I reached college I could not really call myself a believer in God let alone a Catholic. I attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison for my undergraduate work. It was spring of my freshman year and I began to have a yearning to attend Mass. This was really my first experience with God's will and the mystery that it comes with. To this day I am unable to tell you exactly why I had such yearnings other than God stirring my heart. Later, the university Catholic center I was attending began to advertise bible studies and I had a desire to attend one, again for no obvious reason that I can explain, but God's promptings. At that point in my life, my conception of bible studies was that they were filled with a bunch people just like Ned Flanders from the Simpsons!

I was soon corrected in that notion, because I realized that this was a group of people striving to grow (and struggling) with their faith and trying to discern God's will in their life and having fun while they were doing it. One of those people in that bible study was the then future Father Nate Reesman, now serving at St. Mary's Elm Grove as associate pastor.

Even though I came back to the faith didn't mean that my struggles with God's will in my life were over. After I was confirmed I began discerning a call to the priesthood. I even began the application process to the seminary. But then something happened, I became very unsure of God's will in my life and I became afraid and never completed that application. I struggled with the mystery of God's will in my life for more than two years, but through much prayer and thought I found myself building up the courage not to be afraid of the call from God to enter seminary.

I would be amiss if I did not say that God has been greatly generous to me as well, and has never given up on me. He was generous enough to bring a person such as me back into the Church, to give me a great family and great friends who strengthen my faith, and to give me the opportunity to discern a call to love and serve Him with my whole life. Our Lord is truly generous beyond all human imagining!

I would like to share with you an essential help that I have learned is the most important in dealing with the mysterious nature of God's will and recognizing God's generosity in our lives. Prayer. I want to encourage you in your prayer life. There is no greater foundation for having a personal relationship with God than prayer. Daily prayer, even five minutes worth, can help you to know God's will and generosity in your life and break down as much as God allows, His mysterious ways in your life.

Last week I spoke of the generosity that God has shown me in my time in the seminary so far. However, I left something out. God has now been generous to me by bringing me into such a great parish community as Saint Dominic's. My God be generous upon us all! God bless all of you!