

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time B.

OUR RESPONSORIAL PSALM SAID SO MUCH SO BEAUTIFULLY:

"THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD GIVE JOY TO THE HEART; THE RULE OF THE LORD IS TO BE TRUSTED, IT GIVES WISDOM TO THE SIMPLE." (PS 18)

WHAT A CLEAR MESSAGE. WHAT AN IMAGE FOR OURSELVES AND FOR ALL OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS: A JOYFUL HEART, IMAGINE A WORLD OF JOYFUL HEARTS. IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE SIMPLICITY WAS TRUE WISDOM, AND WHERE TRUE WISDOM WAS SIMPLICITY, WHAT CAN MAKE AN IMAGE LIKE THAT REAL? TRUST, FOR ONE THING. AND WHAT IS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST? NOT MUCH. REALLY HARDLY ANYTHING ANYMORE, IS RELIABLE, TRUSTWORTHY, AND TRUE. BUT THE PSALM GIVES US ONE THING THAT IS: THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD ARE TRUE. WHAT IS THE RULE OF THE LORD? WHEN YOU GET A NEW DIGITAL CAMERA, THE MANUFACTURER PUTS A USER'S MANUAL IN THE BOX, AND WHEN YOU GET A NEW CAR YOU GET A DRIVER'S MANUAL. THE RULE OF THE LORD IS LIKE THAT. THE LORD IS THE CREATOR: HE MADE US, WE BELONG TO HIM. MAKING US, HE KNOWS WHAT MAKES US TICK. HE KNOWS THE RULES OF LIFE, WHAT WILL BRING US TO A HAPPY END, TO A JOYFUL HEART. THIS IS THE RULE OF THE LORD, AND HE PACKS IT RIGHT THERE IN THE BOX ALONG WITH US. THE RULE OF LIFE FOR EVERY HUMAN CREATURE IS IN OUR HEART. SPENDING TIME LEARNING TO READ OUR HEARTS, TO REFINE OUR CONSCIENCES, WE CAN KNOW THE RULE OF THE LORD; WE CAN KNOW WHAT WILL YIELD A JOYFUL HEART. BEFORE THERE WERE BOOKS THERE IS THE GRACE OF THE SPIRIT; AND AS BOOKS ARE WRITTEN IN INK, SO THE LAW OF THE LORD IS WRITTEN ON OUR HEARTS WITH THE SPIRIT. BUT THE RULE OF THE LORD IS ALSO IN BOOKS, IN SCRIPTURE. IT IS ESPECIALLY IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS CHRIST. JESUS, THE WORD OF GOD INCARNATE, IS THE PRECEPT OF THE LORD: LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART, YOUR WHOLE SOUL YOUR WHOLE MIND, AND ALL YOUR STRENGTH; AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. SIMILARLY, THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD CAN BE READ IN THE LIVES OF THE COUNTLESS HOLY MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE FOLLOWED JESUS. IF IT WEREN'T SUNDAY, TODAY WOULD BE THE MEMORIAL OF THERESE OF LIESEUX. IN A FEW DAYS IT IS ST FRANCIS, THEN ST BRUNO, THEN TERESA OF JESUS. ALL OF THESE WERE "OF JESUS." THEY LEARNED FROM HIM, WHO IS MEEK AND HUMBLE OF HEART; THE LIVED INTIMATELY WITH HIM; THEY KNEW A JOYFUL HEART BY KNOWING THE RULE OF THE LORD, THE RULE OF HUMAN LIVING, IN JESUS. FINALLY, WE KNOW THE PRECEPTS OF THE LORD FROM THE RICH TRADITION OF OUR CHRISTIAN HERITAGE. THERE IS THE CREED, AND THERE IS THE CATECHISM, AND THERE ARE THE TEACHINGS OF THE POPES AND OF THE BISHOPS. ALL OF THESE PRESENT US WITH THE RULE OF THE LORD, WISDOM TO THE SIMPLE AND GLADNESS OF HEART. HERE IS A STATEMENT OF THE RULE OF THE LORD; HERE IS A RECIPE FOR WISOM AND A GLAD HEART. IT

IS FROM POPE BENEDICT, FROM HIS ENCYCLICAL, GOD IS LOVE. HE COMMENTS ON WHAT WE ARE DOING THIS MORNING, ON THE EUCHARIST, THE MASS. "EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION," BENEDICT SAYS, "INCLUDES THE REALITY BOTH OF BEING LOVED BY GOD AND OF LOVING OTHERS IN TURN." HE EXPLAINS THE IMPLICATIONS: "A EUCHARIST WHICH DOES NOT PASS OVER INTO THE CONCRETE PRACTICE OF LOVE IS INTRINSICALLY FRAGMENTED." IT IS A "LOVELESS EUCHARIST." THE POPE LOOKS AT THE SAINTS: THEY "CONSTANTLY RENEWED THEIR CAPACITY FOR LOVE OF NEIGHBOR FROM THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH THE EUCHARISTIC LORD, AND CONVERSELY THIS ENCOUNTER ACQUIRED ITS REALISM AND DEPTH IN THEIR SERVICE TO OTHERS. LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF NEIGHBOR ARE THUS INSEPARABLE." WE KNOW THAT. IT IS SIMPLE. WE KNOW THAT. IF WE LIVED IT, WE WOULD BE WISE. WE WOULD HAVE A GLAD HEART. SO WOULD EVERYONE ELSE. IT IS THE PRECEPT OF THE LORD. A CLEAR AND SIMPLE MESSAGE. THE POPE BENEDICT SPOKE ABOUT CONCRETE PRACTICES OF LOVE. WE CANNOT HELP BUT THINK OF JESUS. "I WAS A STRANGER," HE SAID, "AND YOU WELCOMED ME." "I WAS" "AND YOU." THIS IS THE EQUATION, THIS IS THE FORMULA. "I WAS" "AND YOU." THIS IS EUCHARIST IN ACTION, TAKEN OUTSIDE THE WALLS OF THE CHURCH. THERE IS ANOTHER BENEDICT, ST BENEDICT. HIS RULE IS FOR US MONKS ANOTHER HAPPY ENUNCIATION OF THE PRECEPT OF THE LORD, BENEDICT RECALLS THIS SAYING OF THE LORD IN HIS CHAPTER ON THE RECEPTION OF GUESTS (RB 53). "ALL GUESTS WHO PRESENT THEMSELVES ARE TO BE WELCOMED AS CHRIST, FOR HE HIMSELF WILL SAY: I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU WELCOMED ME." I WAS A STRANGER. OUR THREE READINGS TODAY ARE A COMMENTARY ON THIS. IN THE FIRST READING, TWO MEN WHO WEREN'T WHERE THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE, RECEIVED THE SAME SPIRIT OF PROPHECY AS THE REST WHO WERE. TO JOSHUA, THESE TWO WERE "STRANGERS." "MY LORD," HE CRIES TO MOSES, "STOP THEM." AND MOSES RIGHTLY SAYS, "ARE YOU JEALOUS? IF ONLY THE LORD WOULD MAKE EVERYONE A PROPHET." (NUM 11: 25.) IN THE LETTER TO JAMES, THE FARM LABORERS ARE STRANGERS TO THE RICH LAND OWNERS, AND THAT STRIKES US CLOSE TO HOME. (THE RICH LANDOWNERS, BESIDES, ARE PROBABLY STRANGERS TO THEMSELVES, BUT THAT'S ANOTHER MATTER.) FINALLY, IN THE GOSPEL, THE DISCIPLES, LIKE JOSHUA, TRY TO STOP SOMEONE DOING JESUS' WORK PRECISELY BECAUSE "HE IS NOT ONE OF US." HE IS A STRANGER. WE CAN TURN JESUS'S RULE INTO A QUESTION: "I WAS A STRANGER...AND WHAT DID YOU DO...?" IN AMERICAN CULTURE TODAY THERE ARE MANY STRANGERS WHO ARE CALLING FOR OUR ANSWER. THERE IS THE STRANGER IN THE WOMB WHO MAYBE NOT INVITED INTO A HOME; THERE IS THE STRANGER IN THE PETRI DISH, PLASMA TO CURE MY DISEASE; THERE IS THE STRANGER PICKING OUR PRODUCE AND PLUCKING OUR CHICKENS, BUT NOT INVITED TO OUR TABLE. THERE IS PROBABLY EVEN A STRANGER IN OUR HOME, SOMEONE WITH OUR OWN NAME, BUT A STRANGER STILL. LAST WEEK THE BISHOP SENT OUT A LETTER. HE WAS ALERTING US THAT TODAY, OCTOBER 1, IS RESPECT FOR LIFE SUNDAY. A CONCRETE WAY TO RESPECT LIFE IS TO WELCOME THE STRANGER. OUR READINGS TELL US WHY WE ARE SLOW TO DO THAT: WE ARE JEALOUS, WHICH MEANS WE SOMEHOW

FEEL INFERIOR; WE ARE GREEDY, WHICH MEANS WE REALLY DON'T TRUST THE PROVIDENTIAL CARE OF THE CREATOR GOD WHO MADE US ALL. WE WANT MORE THAN OUR SHARE. THERE ARE SEVERAL CLASSES OF PEOPLE BEGGING FOR GOSPEL HOSPITALITY IN THE U.S. TODAY. THERE ARE THE UNBORN; THERE ARE THE ELDERLY AND SEVERLY HANDICAPPED; AND THERE ARE THE IMMIGRANTS, THE REFUGEES, THE ASYLUM SEEKERS. SPEAKING OF THEM ALL OUR CATHOLIC BISHOPS SAY, "BASED ON SCRIPTURAL AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS, AS WELL AS HER OWN EXPERIENCE AS AN IMMIGRANT CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS COMPELLED TO RAISE HER VOICE ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO ARE MARGINALIZED AND WHOSE GOD-GIVEN RIGHTS ARE NOT RESPECTED." THERE HAS BEEN MUCH TALK RECENTLY ABOUT IMMIGRATION LAWS. THERE ARE NEW BILLS BEING VOTED ON IN CONGRESS. THE US BISHOPS SAY OUR NATION'S CURRENT IMMIGRATION LAWS AND POLICIES HAVE OFTEN LED TO THE UNDERMINING OF IMMIGRANTS' HUMAN DIGNITY, AND HAVE KEPT FAMILIES APART. SOME FEATURES OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE BILLS WOULD ADDRESS THAT PROBLEM. BUT OTHER FEATURES OF THOSE BILLS ARE LESS THAN "YOU WELCOMED ME." IN A JOINT LETTER ISSUED IN 2003 THE BISHOPS OF THE U.S. AND OF MEXICO STATED FIVE SIMPLE PRINCIPLES FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM: 1. PERSONS HAVE RIGHTS TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES IN THEIR HOMELAND; 2. WHEN THESE ARE NOT AVAILABLE, THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO MIGRATE TO FIND WORK AND SUPPORT FOR THEIR FAMILIES; 3. ECONOMICALLY STRONGER NATIONS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO ACCOMMODATE THEM; 4. REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS SHOULD BE PROTECTED; 5. AND THE HUMAN DIGNITY AND RIGHTS OF THE UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS SHOULD BE RESPECTED. AS CATHOLICS

WE HAVE THE LAW OF THE LORD WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS. WE HAVE IT IN THE PERSON OF JESUS, THE ONE WHO CAME TO HIS OWN, AND HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT. WE HAVE IT IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, AND IN THE TEACHING OF OUR POPES AND BISHOPS. POPE BENEDICT SAID IN A HOMILY RECENTLY, "FAITH IS NOT MEANT TO INSTIL FEAR; RATHER, IT IS MEANT TO CALL US TO ACCOUNTABILITY. WE ARE NOT MEANT TO WASTE OUR LIVES, MISUSE THEM OR SPEND THEM SIMPLY FOR OURSELVES. IN THE FACE OF INJUSTICE WE MUST NOT REMAIN INDIFFERENT AND THUS END UP SILENT COLLABORATORS OR OUTRIGHT ACCOMPLICES." (12 SEPT 2006) IT IS OUR DUTY AND OUR PRIVILEGE TO BRING THE LAW OF THE LORD INTO THE LIFE OF OUR COUNTRY AND OF OUR STATE. IN THE END, IT MEANS ONLY A JOYFUL HEART FOR ALL. THIS IS EUCHARIST TAKEN TO THE WORLD, WITHOUT BOUDARIES.

October 1, 2006