

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

Pope Benedict once wrote in a book about the historical critical method. The historical critical method was an attempt to understand Jesus in a new way. It was an attempt to understand the mindset of who Jesus was with psychology and such methods. Benedict said that with this method we learned very little about Jesus but what we really learned was the mindset of the person attempting the method. If the person was a liberal theologian, then Jesus was a liberal theologian. If the person was a feminist, Jesus became a feminist. The method only achieved one thing and that was to attempt to make Jesus into one's image and likeness. I propose that we have done the same thing with the Church. We have tried to remake the Church into our likeness and not learned to love her for who she is. This is a great danger, of course, to re-make the Church into our image and likeness because we don't hold the keys of Heaven in our hands and we cannot bring a single soul to Heaven because we do not own Heaven and are not the judges who let people in or cast them out. If we make the Church into something else, can we provide Heaven for these people who we have remade the Church into? We cannot. We have to accept the Church as she is, just as we must accept Jesus as He is.

If we think that it is not important to teach moral law or that mortal sin is not a big thing, we are doing everyone a big disservice, because that is not what Jesus teaches. If we try to make the road large and easy that leads to Heaven, we are not helping anyone because the road is not wide and the way is not easy that leads to salvation. If we have held on that we will roll into Heaven, we are wrong and putting all souls who follow us in peril of damnation. We cannot say that fornication, contraception, adultery, abortion, euthanasia, pornography are okay. They are death to us and our world. There is very little that is morally neutral out there, especially if we are spending time at it. We cannot elect anyone we choose if they have blood on their hands. We cannot elect them because we will share in their sin if we support people who support abortion and euthanasia and even demand it of their party members to fall in line. If everyone supported it, we might be able to look for the lesser of the evil. But we will share in the blood of what we do. I know that what Jesus and the Church calls us to do is hard and uncomfortable and feels even impossible, I struggle, too. But with the grace of God it is possible.

If we were called to win a championship and our life depended on it, would you respect the coach who lowered the bar for you and made you feel good, all the while not challenging you to be all that you were created to be, even though they knew it wasn't enough to win this life or death scenario? I hope not. I hope that we wouldn't care if someone led us happily to our death when we could have life.

In the First Reading, we have a battle. It is life or death for the Israelites. The enemy was out to kill them. This was not a nice thing. Joshua battled with the soldiers below, while Moses, Hur and Aaron prayed on the hill above. As long as they prayed, the battle was won. They prayed until Moses could not hold up his hands then they held up his hands until the battle was won. We cannot live our faith without life or death radical prayer. We cannot win this battle without prayer, without grace. You and I need grace to live and fight against this death that is out there. The grace which comes from the Sacraments is essential for us to live this life and be prepared for Heaven. Think of the Sacraments as the Aaron and Hurs in our lives. Of course we are tired, tired of being in this fight, and like Moses, we want to lower our hands and give in and take

another easier route. What does it look like to get along with the world? Can't we make a truce? NO, we cannot, the enemy says it will kill us. The enemy does not want us to go to Heaven, the enemy wants us to go to hell. The enemy is not going to rest so we can't either. But we do not have the strength to fight our enemy, which is naturally stronger than us, as gravity was stronger than the arms of Moses. We need power from on high to defend and be victorious in the battle. Joshua's troops could not win on their own, they needed God to help them. We cannot win and turn back the tide until we see the Sacraments as life and death, as grace. Do we see coming here as life and death, meaning if we don't come we will die? Which is true because it is a mortal sin to purposely miss Mass. We must listen to the plain words of Jesus and His bride the Church because they are in charge of Heaven and have the power to bind and loose. There is no one who has another heaven that you might get into if Jesus is a little too tough for us. We cannot remake Heaven or the requirements for it because we don't own it. Heaven has a very strong immigration policy, let us not be fooled. Hell is the one with loose requirements.

You and I need grace to follow the way of Heaven. We must pray like the widow in the Gospel to have the courage to reach out for it. What does our prayer life look like? What does our sacramental life look like? Do we feel we really need these graces to obtain Heaven? If we think no then we have been overcome and need to repent and come back to God, and beg that we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. We are in a desperate struggle, to not know that means the struggle has overcome us. We need to pray to battle once again with the tools that have been given us. I have been listening to the book, "The Last Crusader: the Story of Don Juan of Austria." Don Juan was a Spanish war hero who pushed back the Muslim invasion of Europe in the famous battle of Lepanto which was won just like the battle in the First Reading, people praying and Don Juan and his army fighting. It was a good reminder of the forces we face. In one of the sieges, the Christian soldiers surrendered as their fortification was overrun and made it the terms of peace. The Muslim army promised them they could leave peacefully as well as the townspeople who had taken refuge in the fortification. Once they surrendered, they were all murdered except the women who were given as slaves to the victorious army. If we surrender this same thing happens to us. If we listen to others who tell us *to take it easy, Heaven is not that hard, you're a good person*, then we have been lured into surrendering to a people who cannot get us into Heaven. The Good News is if we have surrendered and given up, the battle has not been decided, we can rise up, go to Confession and have our arms raised once again by the power of God which can allow us to do the unthinkable - win Heaven through His grace. Let us not waste our time listening to those who tell us about God and Heaven but do not have the keys of Heaven. Heaven is won with grace. It is the greatest battle. Us praying, us participating in the Sacraments are essential for the final victory.