

The Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - Have the courage to embrace and fulfill his will here on earth, no matter what obstacles we may face.

June 9, 2024.

Jesus was focused on his mission. In fact, he worked so hard to fulfill his mission that it was "impossible for [him and his disciples] even to eat." But not everyone appreciated Jesus and his dedication to his mission. Even his own extended family thought he was crazy. It must have been hard for Our Lord to stay focused on his mission, to be faithful to what his Father had sent him to do when he ran into so much opposition, mockery, and misunderstanding. He didn't let criticism, rejection, jealousy, mockery, or persecution to interfere with his loving fulfillment of God's will. Where did he get the courage to be true to his identity and mission even when those closest to him were rejecting him? In his relationship with the Father, his heart was anchored in the everlasting love of the Lord, in doing God's will. As this Sunday's Psalm puts it: "My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak." Sometimes, we too find it difficult to be faithful to follow God's will and his commandments to achieve our mission in life due to the circumstances that he permits to trouble us. And so, we too need to **anchor our hearts in the Lord**, so as to persevere, be strong, and endure.

St. Paul learned this lesson well. He, like Christ, also had a mission, and he, like Christ, also faced opposition of every kind. But he was courageous, because his heart and mind were anchored in heaven, not here on earth. That's why he is able to say, as in the Second Reading, "we look not at what is seen but at what is unseen. In fact, he says, the sufferings of this life, as harsh as they may be, are only a "momentary light affliction," which is preparing for each of us "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." And he encourages all of us to remember that our true home is not here on earth, but in heaven, where "we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands." And all of this advice is not just abstract platitudes. St. Paul knew what it was like to persevere in the face of difficulties. "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked...in dangers from rivers... from robbers...from my countrymen... there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches..." St. Paul experienced all of that in his efforts to be faithful to his life mission - and he persevered.

That's the kind of strength that comes from having our hearts anchored in heaven. A sure sign that our hearts are anchored in heaven is interior joy. Even in the face of our weaknesses, failings, sins, and difficulties, if our souls are firmly anchored in God, we will be able to be cheerful at heart. Ultimately, holiness is the fastest road to true happiness, and so the closer we are united with God, the more we will experience and spread true joy. St. Theresa of Avila used to say that "a sad saint is a bad saint." St. Dominic Savio, a boy who was a disciple of St. John Bosco, decided at a very young age that he wanted to be a saint but was always in a sad mood. St. John Bosco noticed this, and he asked him what was wrong. The young Dominic explained that he was trying to be holy, to live close to God. St. John Bosco praised the future saint's intention, but pointed out that since God is always in heaven, he can't be in a bad mood, and so those who truly love God won't stay in bad moods for long either. In fact, St. John Bosco used to say: "Enjoy yourself as much as you like, if only you keep from sin." St. Alphonsus Liguori gave this advice: "Whenever we feel trapped in a bad mood, we should try to dispel it immediately and not linger over it, distracting ourselves by reading a book, by singing a snatch of a hymn, or by discussing some pleasant topic with a friend." St. Therese of Lisieux used to turn even her weakness and littleness into motives for spiritual joy. Here's a prayer she wrote that describes how she did it: "Lord Jesus, I am not an eagle. All I have are the eyes and the heart of one. In spite of my littleness, I dare to gaze at the sun of love and long to fly toward it and my heart is at peace."

Anchoring our hearts in heaven gives us a source of courage so that we can follow Christ faithfully here on earth. But how can we set the anchor and keep it firmly in place? This is what the spiritual life is all about. And there are **four pillars to a healthy spiritual life**. First, and most important, is **prayer**. Prayer is a lifting of the heart and mind to God, an asking of good things from God, and conversing with God. We need to begin and end each day with prayer. And we need to set aside a few minutes every single day just to be alone with the Lord, our Creator, our God. This is a daily God-time. In these 15 or 20 minutes alone with the Lord, we can read and reflect on the Bible or another good spiritual book. We can write down our reflection in a spiritual diary. We can

simply speak to the Lord from our hearts, or even engage in Christian meditation. Without prayer, it is impossible to keep our hearts anchored in heaven. Second, we have **the sacraments**. All the sacraments unite our souls to God, and they strengthen us and nourish us with God's grace. This is especially true of Holy Communion and Confession – these should be as regular a part of our lives as eating and sleeping. Third, we need to make a daily effort to **follow Christ's teachings and example** in all of our words, actions, and relationships. Fourth, we need true **Christian fellowship**. We can't do it alone; we are not meant to; Christians are not lone rangers. By weaving these four means for spiritual growth more and more deeply into our lives – prayer, the sacraments, Christ-like virtue, and Christian fellowship - we will do our part to keep our lives anchored in heaven, so that no difficulty, opposition, or challenge can throw us off course.

The courage that comes from having our hearts anchored in heaven enables us to embrace and fulfill God's will here on earth. But how do we know what God's will is? There are **four ways to know God's will**. First of all, we have **the Commandments** of the Bible and the Church. The Ten Commandments, Christ's command to love our neighbours as ourselves, the Church's trustworthy teaching about modern moral issues, these are the first and most basic ways that God reveals his will to us. Second, we have the **duties of our state in life**. This is an area of God's Providence: the normal responsibilities that go along with our normal roles and relationships are an essential part of his will for us. Spouses need to serve, honour, and love each other. Parents need to protect, provide for, and educate their children. Students need to be responsible and diligent in their studies. Lawyers need to be honest and hardworking in defending justice. Wherever we find ourselves, we have some basic relationships and responsibilities in the world and in the Church - being faithful to them is God's will for us. Third, we need to contemplate and follow the **example of Jesus Christ**.

Every Christian should strive to imitate Jesus Christ, to follow in his footsteps - in all our words and in all our actions. Fourth, we need to **seek God's guidance** whenever we have to make a major decision. Changing jobs, buying a house, joining the seminary or a religious order, getting married - these are life-decisions that God really cares about. He wants to guide us in these moments. We need to let him - by getting good advice from people who are wise, and by seeking light and guidance through prayer. The Commandments, the duties of our state in life, the example of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit - these are the four ways that we can know God's will. As we go through our daily living, let us beg God for the grace to keep our hearts anchored always in heaven, so that we can have the courage to embrace and fulfill his will here on earth, no matter what obstacles we may face.