

## Twenty-Third Sunday Ordinary time, Labor Day, September 6, 2020

Ezekiel 33:7-9; Psalm 95, 6-7, 8-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 18:15-20

Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs III-Jesus, the Way to the Father

Homily: Fr. Ed Hislop

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**G**rant that all the faithful of the church, looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith, may constantly devote themselves to the service of the Gospel." Words we will pray with the whole Church at the Lord's Table as we offer our "Great Thanksgiving."

As these summer days are coming to a close, the months have been filled with uncertainty, sickness, division, weather disasters and too many words and deeds of hate, violence, and lies; and there has been too much silence in the face of such acts. Summer days for sure, filled with confusion, anger, sickness, overwhelming death, grief, and heartbreak.

Yet, amid everything that has happened and is happening these challenging summer days have been filled as well with heroic service, compassionate presence, living sacrifice, and true love of neighbor. Even the silence has been broken and some have sought to discern the truth.

Many are "looking into the signs of the times by the light of faith:" Faith in God, faith in truth, faith in the dignity of each human person, breaking the silence with calls for justice, true equality, and deeds of mercy. Words of hope are heard and seen, even as the birth pangs of a new way of living are crying out in both the heart and the streets, testing the vision promised, the word spoken, the human rights guaranteed, and the life given and assured.

Many, do indeed, look into the signs of the times by the light of faith as they care for the sick, especially those stricken with "the virus," with unrelenting and courageous spirit; many sacrifice our own convenience and comfort, just to protect others—strangers and friends, during this terrifying pandemic.

We look into the signs of the times as the silence is broken, and we hear the plaintive cries of grief and pain among so many these days, feeling our own hearts break and our soul weep as we search for ways to change, serve, care, and welcome. We look into the signs of the times when we determine to speak and name the darkness by the light of the

Gospel and the words of Christ; and when by its light and Christ's promise of hope we choose to both face and name the evils and sins of the day: prejudice and hatred, deliberated division, separation, and privilege, unrequited anger and violence, an uncontrolled pandemic and perhaps the greatest evils of all: silence and apathy.

Yet, as this summer begins to wane, we have just heard God break the silence and speak with a voice that seems new for these days in this time, words addressed to us, we who are the Church:

*"You, I have appointed watchman for the house..." "If today you hear God's voice harden not your hearts..." "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law;" "If a brother or sister sins against you go and point out the fault..." ...and "gather together in my name," and there I will be!*

So...we who gather in the name of Christ, here and in every Church, must together seek to hear his word to us and the world. We who gather are the "people on watch," sentinels, looking into the signs of the times by the light of the Gospel, devoting ourselves to its service and mission. People on the watch, who cannot be silent but must seek and speak truth, attentive to the needs of all, sharing their grief and pain, their joy and hope.

We cannot, let ourselves become hardened of heart, despondent, discouraged or even fearful in "ominous days" such as these. We owe no one anything, except to love them with a spirit sensitive to the burdens each bear. We follow this Christ in whose name we gather so, we have no choice but to watch and cherish each sister and brother; to love them all as our neighbor and to bring them the good news of salvation.

The Church is our foundation, so we, not only as individuals but as the community of faith, must do as the Gospel today directs us: point out the faults, name the dark and frightening sins of disruption, division, and exclusion: all the while aware that it is not enough to name the faults or point out the sin.

Jesus makes an unexpected, even surprising remark about those who perpetrate the sin, do not listen, or will not change. He says, *"treat them as you would a gentile or tax collector."* At first glance that sounds like a disparaging remark that could mean "stay away from them." But that is not how Jesus acted toward such persons. He befriended, conversed and, ate with them. He did not exclude even those who would not listen. In doing that hearts were changed.

Together, because we "devote ourselves to the service of the Gospel," we help bear the burden of others, our neighbors; those longing and shouting for justice, equality, health, and safety and the

burden of those who fear justice and equality for all.

This is the perplexing and challenging work entrusted to us, together, on this Labor Day. The work of watching, "being attentive to the needs of *all*, that in sharing their grief and pain, their joy and hope, we may ...bring them the good news of salvation" from sickness, hatred, division, anger, and darkness, "and go forward *with them* along the way... .

*"If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts."*



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