

Sunday, Sept. 22, 2019

**Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

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The common theme that strikes me in today's readings is the importance of checking our attitudes – and actions. In responding to the call to live our lives consistent with the teachings of Jesus, it is important that we regularly assess how we are measuring up. The scriptures today offer an opportunity to evaluate our progress.

The first reading from Amos is a strong and clear call to treat the poor justly. We should not be cheaters in our dealings with others, especially the poor. Most of us, I would guess, would respond that we would never do the kinds of actions condemned by Amos: fixing scales to our advantage or being greedy at the expense of other people.



But I'm reminded of the quote from St. Basil that is so challenging:

“When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard belongs to the poor.”

The question, therefore, is not simply one of cheating or being greedy, but rather, what are our attitudes toward the poor and our possessions.

- Do I believe that I work hard for what I possess, and whatever sharing I do with the poor is primarily from my surplus?
- Do I silently harbor beliefs that the poor are poor because they are lazy?
- Do I support programs that provide direct relief to the poor (feeding, housing, etc.), but at the same time criticize welfare programs as government handouts that discourage the poor from working?

The second reading emphasizes the importance of praying for others, which again most of us would say, “sure, we do that”. However, included in that reading is the injunction to “pray for kings and all in authority.” While we are not all in the same place politically, for me the challenge is to pray even for Donald Trump. The challenge again is to nurture attitudes that take us deeper into the call to pray for others.

- Am I committed to prayer for those I don't like, maybe even can't stand, because they too are children of God and loved by God as much as God loves me? Whew, that's tough.

The third reading from Luke, which I find to be a little convoluted, nevertheless is clear on at least one point in the final line – put God first. Again, I think those of us who are people of faith

would say that this is basic to who we are as Christians. It provides another opportunity to assess our attitudes.

- Where and how do I spend my time? A maxim that has always stuck with me is “Where you put your time you put your life.” How much of my time is spent in cultivating my spiritual side, in looking beyond the day-to-day realities to something deeper.

These readings challenge me to go beyond the surface, the obvious, the quick and sometimes simplistic answer. God wants more than that from us.