

There Is No Substitution for Jesus  
September 25, 2011

To continue from last weekend's homilies from our holy deacons –

“The Lord's way is not fair!” (Ezekiel 18:25)...it's just not fair!

Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven  
before the chief priests and elders?! (Matthew 21: 31).

That's what we hear in our Gospel today from Matthew...and it comes  
directly from Jesus' own two lips.

And my response is: Really?! Sinners...nasty, greedy, and dirty  
sinners are getting into heaven before the seemingly righteous  
people?! How is this possible?!

I thought heaven was for the righteous ones...those who follow the will  
of God and keep His commandments.

Tax collectors and prostitutes aren't exactly known for this.

Tax collectors lied, stole, bullied, and manipulated people to get every  
last cent they could. Their only focus was money...and lots of  
it...and they didn't care who they had to walk over to get it!

Prostitutes...well, that's self explanatory. They were concerned only  
about immediate sensual pleasure and like the tax collectors, did  
anything to get it.

Now, I may be wrong, but these don't exactly seem like the people  
who followed God's law much less even believed in God. But,  
Jesus tells us they are the ones getting into heaven before  
others.

And so, I ask the question again...how in the world are they getting the reward of eternal life with God in His heavenly kingdom? In order to answer this, I propose another question: What things do we use to fill our lives up with in place of Christ? Put another way, what do we substitute for Jesus? It appears, at first glance, that tax collectors substituted money in place of Christ. It also appears that prostitutes substituted sensual pleasure in place of Christ. But, as with all things, we need to go deeper to see why they are getting into heaven before the chief priests and elders. So, at a second glance, we see something very significant and important: "When John came to you" [chief priests and elders] "in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did" (Matthew 21: 32). And what did John do when he came...he preached, he preached about: the coming of the Messiah – the one foretold by the prophets who would bring salvation to all who believed...he preached the Son of God! And it was the tax collectors and prostitutes who believed this message and revelation over the chief priests and elders. That's why they are getting into heaven first...because although they were sinners, they believed in the Son of God who came to forgive sins and restore humanity back to God!

So, even though it seems that they substituted sin for Jesus, in reality, once hearing the Truth that is Christ, they gave up their sinful ways and turned wholeheartedly to the Savior of the world.

And now, with their example given to us, the question is presented to us more directly: what things are we placing before Christ? What are we substituting for Jesus?

I think some, if not all, of us do this at time to time.

I found myself doing this during my college years.

I poured myself into my classes and studies. I spent many, many hours a week working on projects, reading text books, and conversing with classmates on assignments.

When I wasn't doing that, I was spending time with friends socializing and hanging out.

And every now and then, I found time to play ice hockey or softball or flag football with some friends...just to pass the time.

It seemed like I was doing everything but working on my relationship with Christ.

Don't get me wrong, I still went to Mass every Sunday...but, that was it...1 hour a week for God was all I was willing to give Him.

I had done a good job of substituting other activities and things in place of Christ...and for a while, it didn't bother me.

But, eventually, I found myself wanting more...not more things and activities, but more substance, more meaning in life.

That's when I discovered that what I wanted was God...a personal, meaningful relationship with God...and there was no substitute for that!

There were no classes that could replace that...no amount of friends ...no sport that could give me what I knew I could get with God.

And that's when I started seeking a deeper relationship with Christ.

That's when I started to believe in the One who could give me all that I desired...and more!

So, my friends, what things are we filling our lives up with in place of Christ?

What are we substituting for Jesus?

Whatever it is...whoever it is...we must realize that there is no substitute for Jesus!

There is nothing that can fulfill us like God Himself.

Are we ready to rid ourselves of all things, all people, everything that distract us from this very Truth?