

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time (B)
September 27, 2009

What would you be willing to sacrifice in order to fulfill God's will and help advertise His message of peace, forgiveness, and love?

Little Jimmy – only 10 years old – was praying in a restaurant for his family just before they began to eat their meal.

As he prayed, he said, "Thank you Lord for the food we are about to eat and I would thank you even more if mom got us ice cream for desert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen."

Some customers nearby chuckled and thought, "How cute."

One other customer nearby, however, criticized Jimmy's prayer and said, "That's what's wrong with this country today. Kids don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream...how absurd!"

Upon hearing this, little Jimmy began to cry and asked his mom, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me for asking for ice cream?"

"No," his mother replied, "you did a terrific job and God is certainly not mad at you."

As Jimmy's mother was telling him this, an elderly woman approached the table and said to Jimmy, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer. You have nothing to be embarrassed about."

“Really?” asked Jimmy.

“Cross my heart,” replied the woman.

Then, in a quiet whisper so that the other customer couldn’t hear, the woman said, “It’s too bad that man never asked God for ice cream in his life. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometime.”

Naturally, little Jimmy got his ice cream at the end of his meal.

But, before he started to eat it, he looked at it for a moment and then at the man who criticized his prayer just minutes before.

And then he made his mind up.

Silently, without saying a word, Jimmy got up from his seat, took his bowl of ice cream over to the man and gave it to him.

As he did so, with a smile on his face, he told the man, “Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and I feel my soul is already good.”

Whether Jimmy consciously knew it or not, he sacrificed his ice cream for another person.

Doing so, he demonstrated to that other person, and everyone in the restaurant, God’s forgiveness and love.

If only we were willing to sacrifice our “ice cream” to help communicate to others this same message of God’s love.

Our readings today speak about sacrifice, specifically, sacrificing our own judgments, riches, and components in our lives that lead us to sin.

Both in the Book of Numbers and in Mark's Gospel, we read about those who have been "officially installed" by the Spirit and are designated to preach and heal in Christ's name becoming jealous and even judgmental when other people preach and heal in the same Christ's name.

These people falsely believe that the Spirit is meant only for them and that no one else ought to be able to share in this same Spirit of preaching and healing.

And so, what do they do but go and tell Moses and Jesus to make them stop... "Stop those people who are doing good works and helping to advertise God's message of peace, forgiveness, and love!"

I wonder if these "chosen disciples" ever thought about stopping and listening to themselves about how absurd it sounded to want other people to cease doing God's work.

My guess is probably not if they went & petitioned Moses and Jesus. By doing so, these "chosen disciples" of Moses and Jesus failed to sacrifice their own judgments as well as their wills.

They weren't able to put aside their own jealousy and be open to the possibility that maybe God might want to work through other people other than themselves in making known his peace, forgiveness, and love.

And so, these “chosen disciples” learned the hard way how to sacrifice their own preferences for those of God’s.

In the letter to Saint James, we are called to sacrifice our riches and our treasures – material possessions such as money, clothes, electronics, cars, houses, and so forth – because these things lead to misery.

In place of these aspects in our lives, we are to focus our attention on those things that are spiritual and promise everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven such as receiving the Sacraments and following God’s laws.

Doing so will undoubtedly be a sacrifice for us because unfortunately our society has wired us in a way so as to value and put trust in material property.

This is not God’s way.

And as disciples of Christ, we are called to follow God’s way, not society’s way, which means sacrificing our riches and helping to communicate to others God’s peace, forgiveness, and love.

Lastly, in Mark’s Gospel, we told that we should sacrifice those components in our lives that lead to sin.

This is perhaps the hardest sacrifice for us because at times, sin feels so good...and who wants to give up something that makes them feel good?

But, sin’s nature is that of being directly opposed to God.

When we sin, we are removed from God, from His grace, and from eternal salvation that is promised to us by Jesus.

But, God does not want us to be removed from Him.

Rather, He wants us to be near Him so that He can reveal to us His love for us and give us an opportunity to love Him back.

Sin does not allow this to happen and Jesus warns us to avoid falling into sin by telling us to sacrifice those things in our lives that we know lead us into sin.

Thus, we are called to “cut off” a desire for fame and fortune, a desire to accumulate material possessions in life, a desire to be comfortable and relaxed all the time.

In place of these things, we are called to “put on” those things that are of God.

Sacrificing is a most difficult challenge to accept.

Nonetheless, as followers of Jesus, each and every one of us is called to sacrifice judgments, riches, components in our lives that lead to sin, and anything that pulls us away from experiencing and promoting God.

In place of this all, we are to receive and thus, help announce to the world God’s peace, forgiveness, and love.

Are we willing to accept this challenge?