

# A Reflection on the readings for the 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

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*“In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do.  
The worst thing you can do is nothing.”*

— Theodore Roosevelt

The Oblate writer and spiritual director Fr. Ronald Rolheiser tells the story of a friend he has, who, with a whimsical smile on his face, told him about his struggles he had in growing up. He said “when I was in my twenties I felt that by the time I was forty I would have grown-up enough to let go of my bad habits. But, when I turned forty, I gave myself an extra ten years, promising myself that by age fifty, I’d have conquered these habits. Well, now I’m my fifties and I’ve promised myself that by age sixty, I’ll be more mature and more serious about the deeper things in life!”

Procrastination is something that many people struggle with. For many it is a relatively minor human frailty, a cause for whimsy, but for others it can seriously affect their lives and relationships. It can also affect our spiritual lives in ways that are detrimental to growth. Spiritual procrastination can be understood by asking ourselves the question where in our lives are we saying tomorrow, when God is saying to us, no I invite you to do it today, I invite you to do it now! Often we are well intentioned but nevertheless for a myriad of reasons we keep pushing the things we really need to change in our lives off into the future, we say to ourselves in our minds eye, yes, I know I need to do this, but I’m not ready yet, maybe next time, next week or perhaps next year. Social scientists tell us that procrastination can actually be a symptom rather than a cause, it is centred within our emotional selves, it may well be a symptom of perhaps, anxiety, or fear, or perfectionism, if it is a problem for our lives than just maybe we should consider digging a little deeper beyond the symptoms to uncover the cause. Be assured however that God’s love for you, and I, takes all of this into account, this includes all the

common problems we might have with relationships, possessions, sexuality, personality and so on. You know what I mean, it is called being human!

We understand procrastination to be part of the human condition and no respecter of human status or position, it affect sinners and would be saints alike. In book eight, chapter seven of Saint Augustine's autobiography titled Confessions, Augustine famously prays to God asking; "Oh, Master, make me chaste and celibate... but not yet!" Saint Augustine converted to Christianity at age twenty five but he writes openly of his struggle for another nine years to bring his sexuality into harmony with his faith. Saint Augustine nevertheless was called and chosen by God. What than of our own lives and our response to todays' gospel parable.

Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet tells all humanity that God has called every person to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. However it is a challenging parable because it forces us to consider how we view God and how we answer the question how can God be a God of love but at the same time also be a God of judgment? How can God open the wedding feast to everyone, yet bind hand and foot and throw out the one who is not dressed for the occasion.

Well firstly we need to understand that this parable does not mean that God calls a lot of people, waits for them to slip up, picks over them, and keeps only a few. If that were true, the middle of the parable where all are called would have no meaning beyond its commentary of the lack of response of the religious leadership of the time and the openness towards the calling of gentiles and those considered outsiders to the kingdom. Rather for us it should be clear that God calls everyone, the outcasts, especially the poor and disadvantaged, sinners and would be saints, everyone in fact, and gives each one of them the power, the grace to respond, but to be chosen ones as distinct from being invited we must respond to the call, using the power God gives us for this purpose, not in fear as in frightened, but in fear as in respect for God Almighty and the unimaginable love God has for Gods creation. Some (and only God know who) exercise their freedom not to respond to God's loving invitations.

Now in all humility I am generally quite reluctant to speculate on the 'inner' workings of God, not having been raised a Catholic from birth my faith development has been in adulthood and a highly questioning one at that, so when I speak of God I have this internal dialogue going on which says something like, maybe someone will ask you the question how do you know more about God than me or any another created being? In this I tend to be mindful of the response of Saint Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the most famous medieval theologian, a man who tried to gather into one masterwork the whole 'all of truth' under God. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1273 Thomas received a revelation that so affected him that the great man wrote no more. He believed that God had revealed to him that all his efforts to describe God had fallen so far short. He decided never to write again. Speaking with his secretary and friend Reginald he said, " I can do no more, the end of my labours has come. Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems as so much straw." So with a sense of intrepidation I offer you a very brief synthesis on church teaching to assist our better understanding of what God wishes to convey to us, in the knowledge that in the broadest sense, this authority belongs to all of us who share in the threefold mission of the church by virtue of our baptism, and in a narrower sense is held by bishops and the Pope by virtue of their office and by theologians like Saint Thomas by virtue of their great learning.

Looking than at this question of the apparent juxtaposition of God's bountiful love and God's sense of justice we discover something quite marvellous, we find that to God all moments of time are present in their immediacy. God establishes his eternal plan of *predestination*. Predestination means God knows all who will accept His gift of saving grace. So, for all time, the knowledge of God being unlimited, God has known whom would say "yes" to His grace. God includes in his plan each person's free response to his grace. Our free will remains just that, and as such whilst God does not like our sin, and remains open to signs of repentance, and reduced culpability, that sin is nevertheless permitted by God. God stands not only outside of the limitations of this world, of space itself, but also that of time, God is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, past, present, and future are present to God all at once.

What seems incredible to you and I, as time bound creatures of God, poses no such limitations for our creator, it also provides a hint of what we might speculate are the marvels for us to experience once our life in this world ends and we finally see God face to face.

Let's return to our parable. In my last reflection I spoke of the three worlds of the text, that the world behind, the world of and the world in front of the text. Jesus's first audience is a first century Jewish one, (the world behind the text) we have important textual issues to explore in the use of words and phrases like weeping, gnashing of teeth, casting out etc, (world of the text) and finally we turn to what is Jesus teaching us today (the world in front of the text). This my friends is a lengthy and complex exercise and because of its complexity I will summarise by suggesting to you that Jesus and Matthew's community is speaking about the refusal of Israel's religious leaders to respond to the invitation to the banquet, the gathering of the kingdom of God and the separation that takes place at Judgment.

Today I want to only discuss the final point, as in my ministerial experience that is the one that often excites the greatest interest. The king (God) calls him a friend, but evicts him as he has shown up unprepared, he does not wear the clothes of salvation, and we hear that he has nothing to say for himself, he is speechless. We hear eschatological (end times) language to describe what occurs, language that has been used a few times before in scripture. This is a challenging teaching but the message for our lives should be very clear. We need to be ready for the banquet. Our task is to ready our lives and the lives of others that we meet along the way. Fortunately, our salvation is based not on our merit but on Christ's work on the cross. Our readiness then, is the product of truly believing in Jesus Christ and act accordingly. If we believe in him, respond to his Grace, our lives will reflect the kind of clothes we are supposed to be wearing to the banquet. It is in our hands to write our own story. What are we thinking about now, what do we need to pray and reflect about and possibly change?

Procrastination is a close relative of change, something we have previously discussed. I think that fear of change and what it will mean for

our lives is a major contributor to procrastination. I suspect that it can be very threatening to have God become entirely present and concrete in our lives, as opposed to God simply being a reality that will one day become very real. Because if God is present already, and now, that means that our worldview and lives may need to change now and we have think more carefully about pushing things into some indefinite future.

So I want to leave you today with some simple takeaway principles to consider. God ways are always ways of love. God continues to invite us day after day. God never tires of asking us to come to the wedding banquet of his son. Because that invitation is so important, because that banquet is so essential, we should not postpone the opportunity of saying yes to the one who invites us.

What might this mean in practical terms. I will leave you with the thoughts of the famous theologian Karl Rahner. He was asked by many people what he thought God was like, he responded by asking them these set of questions which are included in book, *“Reflections on the Experience of Grace,” Theological Investigations III*. I leave them with you today as one form of, I hope helpful, reflection for your own lives and your relationship with God.

- *Have you ever kept silent, despite the urge to defend yourself, when you were unfairly treated?*
- *Have you ever forgiven another although you gained nothing by it and your forgiveness was accepted as quite natural?*
- *Have you ever made a sacrifice without receiving any thanks or acknowledgement, without even feeling any inward satisfaction?*
- *Have you ever decided to do a thing simply for the sake of conscience, knowing that you must bear sole responsibility for your decision without being able to explain it to anyone?*
- *Have you ever tried to act purely for love of God when no warmth sustained you, when your act seemed a leap in the dark, simply nonsensical?*

- *Have you ever been good to someone without expecting a trace of gratitude and without the comfortable feeling of having been “unselfish”?*

Such a set of questions are of course somewhat limited, but the way of life posed by these questions is indicative of an understanding of God and God’s love for us. Saying yes is in effect; telling God we love God now and not that we might love God eventually or perhaps in some undefined day in the future. Choose to do this and we are no longer depriving ourselves unnecessarily of a life of grace, one that offers joy, peace, and meaning, even through inevitable times of suffering and difficulty.

Have a blessed day.

*“Only in love can I find you, my God. In love the gates of my soul spring open, allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom and forget my own petty self. In love my whole being streams forth out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion, which make me a prisoner of my own poverty emptiness. In love all the powers of my soul flow out toward you, wanting never more to return, but to lose themselves completely in you, since by your love you are the inmost centre of my heart, closer to me than I am to myself.”*

— **Karl Rahner, *Encounters With Silence***