

Peace and Order

In the name of the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, dear saints of God: as I stated before the service, some texts of Scripture are harder than others. In some cases it's because the meaning isn't immediately clear. Today's Gospel is a good example. In it Jesus tells the Parable of the Dishonest Manager – which is a *weird* story. You've got this bungling bookkeeper who's about to be fired. And so, fearing for his future, he cancels large portions of the rents that tenant farmers owe his master. He does this so that they'll feel indebted to him. He hopes that in return, they'll help support him after he loses his job. So far so good; but then the master comes along, learns what the guy has done; and instead of being furious for the way he's been cheated, he congratulates the dishonest steward for being such a clever fellow. What's up with that? What's Jesus telling us? The answer, it turns out, is rather involved; and if you really want to know, ask me after the service and I'll get you a copy of a sermon I wrote some years ago that explains it. The point I'm making is that some texts are hard because they're not easy to understand. Others are hard *not* because we don't know what they mean, but because *we know very well* what they mean; we just don't like what they say. Today's Epistle lesson is a good example of *this kind* of hard text.

And so to introduce it – and to help show why we should be more receptive to its seemingly hard teaching – I'd like to begin with an illustration. Imagine, if you will, two similar homes side by side on a residential street in a typical small town like Clarinda. The two families dwelling in them are more or less equivalent in composition: let's say a husband, a wife, and, for argument's sake, we'll round up from the 2.3 American average to *three* children each. Income and education levels are about equal. And both families are what you'd call "church-going Christians". Up to this point, everything would seem to be about the same.

But that's where the similarities end. As you stand on the sidewalk looking at them, the home to your left speaks of utter chaos. The yard is untidy and unkempt. Broken toys dot the landscape intermixed with parts from old vehicles, expired appliances, and dead lawnmowers. The garage door hangs lazily open like a great yawning mouth revealing tottering stacks of recyclables that resemble rows of rotting teeth. A couple of dirty and dented garbage cans lean together for support in the driveway, overflowing with pizza delivery boxes and take out containers from a nearby Chinese restaurant. If you were to venture inside the house, you'd see more of what you might expect based on the exterior view: helter-skelter piles of dirty dishes, laundry, and other household items arranged in patterns that suggest they might have been dropped from passing aircraft. You'd notice something else inside: that the communal areas where the family might actually gather are occupied in other ways. It tells you that these people don't ever come together, not for meals, not for time together, not for sharing. Rather the five people living here – who would all say they loved each other and mean it – have each cordoned off for themselves their own private space that dare not be trespassed by another. For caution's sake, you don't venture inside. But you know from frequent walks through the neighborhood that at just about any time, day or night, you might hear coming from this house loud, angry voices, the sound of slamming doors, and bitter arguments that, on occasion, overflow from the house to the yard as one contestant storms off in fury while continuing to exchange verbal salvos with an adversary who remains in the door.

The home to your right, in contrast, exudes an atmosphere of warmth and tranquility. The yard is well maintained; but not immaculate by any stretch of the imagination. Patches and paths of wear in the grass suggest that it's used regularly for lawn games and playing catch. Inside the home too there is organization and general tidiness, and yet the place still has a "lived in" look about it. It's not a museum; it's a dwelling place for real people. And it's not that they don't dirty their dishes, make messes, and have laundry to do; it's that there's a system in place for dealing with these routine chores.

More importantly, here there are areas where the family obviously does gather: the kitchen table, though worn and scratched from use, is cleared and ready to be set for the next meal. There's a family room where people sit together and talk, play games, or watch TV. You have the sense that the people who live here are all pulling together – not that there aren't conflicts; but when such arise they don't degenerate into shouting matches. Instead they manage to resolve their differences in a quiet and orderly way. There's a system in place for that too.

Got the picture in your mind of these two homes? All right, now here comes the question – and don't worry, it's not *which home is more like yours* – but this: *in which home would you rather live?* The obvious answer is the latter, the house on the right. But now let's ask the next question: remembering how much the two households have in common, what accounts for the difference between the two? Why is one home characterized by chaos and the other by order and peace?

The answer lies in *vocation*, a word that literally means “calling”. The idea is that the Lord in his wisdom assigns to every person a role (or roles) to carry out in life. That is, he places us where he wants us to be in a family, in a church, in the community at large, and he calls upon us to fulfill the duties and obligations that go along with the roles that he has assigned us in each place. The reason he does this is because he loves us and wants us to live in relative order and peace because it's under these conditions that people thrive the best. When we live as the Lord intends life just goes better. What's your vocation? Well, ask yourself “What am I? What role has the Lord assigned me?” In your family, for instance, are you a husband, wife, father, mother, child, grandparent, single person? Then that's one of your vocations; and the Lord has specific instructions for you about how you are to carry out your calling. If you're not sure, the Table of Duties in the Catechism is a good place to look. The difference in the two homes is that in *one* the family members are not fulfilling their callings, and in the other one they are.

Let me be more direct. To husbands and fathers the Lord has assigned the duty of leadership. It flows from what's called “the order of creation”: Adam was formed first, then Eve. And when we say “order of creation”, it's not just the sequence in which God made man and woman, but the way he has set things up to ensure that families and communities have designated leaders. The Lord doesn't leave us guessing about whom he holds accountable. Please understand that this is not misogyny as some like to accuse. It's not to imply that women are anything less than men. It's simply that the Lord has assigned roles – even as roles exist within the Godhead itself. God the Father is the person ultimately in charge. The Son submits to his Father's will. And the Holy Spirit submits to both the Father and the Son. This does not mean that the Spirit and the Son are any less God than is the Father. In the same way, in the family the Lord says, “Men, you are in charge. I'm holding you accountable. Women, submit to your husbands as the Church submits to Christ. Children, obey your father and your mother, so that it may go well with you.” None of this is meant to be a burden us; it's to establish order and peace so that things will go well with us. The Lord sets up a chain of command to give our lives structure and so we will know what our calling is.

Gentlemen, this means the Lord expects you to establish and enforce the rules of the house. In the illustration I gave before, the home on the left is a mess mostly because the man of the house is not doing his job – and because part of his job is making sure that everyone else does theirs too, no one is fulfilling their callings. Now, he may imagine that he's a progressive thinker and being very egalitarian by allowing everyone to have it their own way; but the fact is that he's failing both his loved ones and the Lord. And by refusing to accept the authority that should be his, he robs his wife of the authority she should have over the children because her authority flows from his. The next door neighbor is taking his calling as a husband and father seriously. He's doing the hard work of making sure that his job gets done and that everybody else does theirs too. That's what leadership is about. It means taking responsibility. It means finding solutions to problems and acting on them. It means holding the people under you accountable – just as you yourself are accountable to the Lord who has given you your authority so that you can serve your family as its leader. Without firm and loving leadership to

establish and enforce the systems by which a family operates, everything devolves into confusion. The calling of the other family members is to recognize, respect, and support the authority the Lord has invested in the man of the house. That's their vocation: to fulfill the duties and obligations they're assigned. And when Dad takes charge, Mom will find that she has more authority too because her voice is backed by a greater authority. And please don't misunderstand me: this doesn't mean that dad sits on the easy chair barking orders while his wife and kids do all the work. That's not good leadership. No, he leads in part by his example. And especially these days, in which most women have jobs outside the home, it means that he develops – with the input of the others – a division of labor that makes sense for his family precisely so that they all *do* pull together, get the household chores done, and actually enjoy time with one another as a family should.

All right, then, it turns out that the Lord's design to bring order and peace to our homes is the same one he gives us for establishing order and peace in our communities, states, and nations. This is why St. Paul enjoins us to pray making supplications, offering intercessions, and giving thanks to God on behalf of all people. That is to say we have another vocation: it's to be good citizens of the land in which we live. And Christians in particular ought to be known as excellent citizens who submit to the governing authorities, obey the laws, and desire and work toward everyone's wellbeing. We do this knowing that this makes things better for us too. When the whole community and country enjoy order and peace it creates a positive environment in which every family benefits.

This is why Paul tells us to pray especially for our rulers and those in authority. They are the Lord's instruments for bringing peace and order to society. The better they do as leaders, the better it will be for us. So pray for them. In our highly politicized and contentious culture this might be counterintuitive. "Why should I pray for that guy? I don't like him and I didn't vote for him. I hope to see him fail." Really? You want bad things to happen now just so that maybe in the next election cycle you can get your guy in there? Does that make sense? It doesn't make any difference who's in power or whether you voted for them. We should still pray that the Lord will guide them, help them to rule well, and make wise decisions because these benefit everyone. It should be said too that when St. Paul wrote this to Timothy, Caesar Nero was on the throne, who was the worst, most self-centered and obnoxious man that ever served as emperor. He ordered the first persecution of Christians and sent hundreds to their deaths, which was all the more reason to pray for him. We too should pray for those in authority at all levels – again, because the better they serve the better it will be for us ...

... and for the Church. This is the next point Paul makes: when there is peace and order in the world, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can go forth unimpeded. It's not that the Church can't do its work in bad conditions; it can and does. But it's awfully hard to teach people about Christ in a consistent and systematic way if they have no homes, no food, no jobs, and they're worried about being robbed by lawless, out of control mobs. The Lord wants all people to come to the knowledge of Christ and be saved. He wants them to know Jesus who offered his life as the ransom for our sins and who now lives and serves as the one and only mediator between God and men. This can happen best when there is overall peace and stability in society – which again falls back to having leaders who serve well; so whoever they are, we ought to pray for them.

And pray we do, on our own privately, in our families, and collectively here in the church when we gather for worship – which is why Paul turns his attention to how the church is to organize itself for worship. He says the men in particular are to pray. He envisions them as not just as the leaders in their homes who oversee the day to day tasks of life, but also the spiritual leaders who lead their families in the worship of the church. With respect to the other men there is not to be angry quarreling and power struggles; but they are to see themselves as brothers in Christ. This is not to say that there are never disputes; but that the disputes are dealt with openly, honestly, and according to God's Word so that they are resolved in a peaceful and orderly way. It's a terrible witness to the world when the men of the church can't get along.

Paul then turns his attention to the women in the church, who he says are not to be preoccupied with their outward beauty and adornment. It seems that even then people lived in a very fashion conscious world. He's not saying that these things are wrong, but he's stressing that far more important for women are the things that God finds beautiful: namely a gentle, submissive spirit and a life full of good works that flow from faith in Christ.

What follows then are some of the hardest and most misunderstood words of the Scripture. Paul writes, "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man." He goes on to state that the reason for this is the order of creation, which I mentioned earlier. That is, just as the Lord has established men as the heads of their families, so also in the church – which is the family of God – the Lord has required that men serve as its leaders, teachers, and preachers. From this it's clear that a woman may not serve as the pastor of a church since it is the primary teaching office. And the pastor's job is to speak the Word of God with power and authority—not his own, but the Lord's. I'm not here to give you my opinion. I'm to speak the Word of God, which is its own authority. And it's an authority that the Lord has not given to women; but to men – precisely so that there is no confusion and that peace and order may be maintained in the church.

For, says St. Paul, "Adam was formed first, then Eve"; which means that the order of creation was established even before the fall into sin. And "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor"; which tells us that the order stands even after the fall. And then finally this: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self control." It's a verse that I believe to be translated incorrectly. If you follow the structure of Paul's argument, it goes: Adam this, Eve that; Adam this, Eve that. Consistent with that pattern, the first subject of the next sentence should be Adam again. What's there is passive verb in the third person singular without a pronoun. So what it says is that *someone* will be saved – but it doesn't specify if that someone is male or female. So, if you follow the structure of the discussion, it makes far more sense to take Adam as the subject of the verb. What it says then is that he will be saved through childbearing. It harks back to Genesis chapter three when the Lord promises to send a Savior for the human race. The Lord says that it's through the woman that the Savior is to come into the world. The idea is that even though the man has been placed in charge, God's plan to save mankind depends on women and their unique vocation of giving birth. He's telling them – and us – that neither men nor women are on their own. We need each other. God's plan of salvation depends upon it, and that we men in particular need to appreciate and honor women for their calling and their vital role in our salvation. Then *together* we will be saved as we continue in Christian faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Thus the Lord gives us instructions about how we are live as his people so that we may enjoy peace and order in our families, in our church, and in the greater community. He does this for our good and so that his Gospel may be spread and many more come to saving faith in his Son. The question is: how are we doing? Let each one of us consider our callings. How are you doing in the roles the Lord has given you? Men, are you taking charge? Are you serving those the Lord has entrusted to your care by leading them with both love and firmness? Are you leading also by your example? How are you doing in your role as spiritual leader? Women, are you showing proper respect for the authority the Lord has placed over you? Are you supporting and encouraging that authority, or are you resisting and seeking to circumvent it? Children, are you honoring and obeying your parents – without complaining; but with thankfulness that the Lord has given you faithful parents to love, care for, and guide you into God's truth? How are we doing as citizens? Faithful, obedient and upholding our leaders in prayer – or something less? How about as members of the church? Are you taking your responsibilities here as you should? Are you upholding me and the leaders of the church constantly in prayer? I can only speak for myself, but if you're like me, I'd say a general call to repentance is in order. Let's do that. Let's repent of the many sins we've seen in ourselves today, that receiving the Lord's forgiveness we may continue forward in Christian faith, love, and holiness enjoying the peace and order that the Lord

gives us as we conform our lives to his Word. It's good for us and it's good for our witness in the world – that many may come to know the saving truth of Jesus Christ. In his holy name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!