

Sample Homily
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Sunday before Labor Day 2005

For the last two or three Sundays, you may recall, we have been reminding ourselves that as the church we are the community of the disciples of Jesus bound together by the faith that we share—the rock on which the church is built. As we know, in every community tensions exist, and it is necessary that we have means to deal with these tensions. Jesus today talks specifically about tensions within the church community, and he instructs his disciples in the means to resolve these tensions. And, in some ways, his advice seems harsh. But we have to notice that in Matthew’s gospel, even though he gives us this process and it’s laid out very clearly, he wants us to realize that this is a process that you carry out within the context of everything that Jesus teaches. Recall that just before this part of the gospel, we have the parable that Jesus tells about the sheep, the one that is lost and the shepherd that goes after it. He leaves the ninety-nine and goes to look for the one that is lost. And right after today’s reading, as we’ll hear next Sunday, Peter says to Jesus, “Well, how many times do you forgive, seven times?” And Jesus says, “No, not seven times. Seven times seven times, without limit.”

And while this morning’s gospel deals with tensions within the church, tomorrow is Labor Day in our country. For our purposes on this Labor Day weekend, let us use this teaching to reflect on discipleship, especially as it applies to our everyday work lives. The average church-going adult in the United States spends 50-60 hours at work, about that many hours at home with family members

and doing family chores, and only 1-2 hours in church services. In short, our discipleship is lived in the world, and the time that we spend together in worship should be spent equipping us to do just that.

For most of us, our “world” includes a workplace. In the Catholic tradition, work is not a burden, not just how we make out living. Work is a way of supporting our family, realizing our dignity, promoting the common good, and participating in God’s creation. In this Catholic understanding, work is not just something to be endured as a way of obtaining money for other pursuits that are seen as “real living.” To live in God’s presence at work with sensitivity, awareness, and love is to live a spiritual life; it is to live our discipleship; it is to build the Kingdom of God.

Our workplace is a community. Our work can be a grace opportunity. It is almost certainly a community characterized, at times, by tension and disruption. While not ignoring the demands of justice, let us remember that as disciples, we are called upon to balance our confrontation with others with an attitude of a “healing heart.” This requires considerable skill, but even more, a deep faith.

As we gather in this place and this morning so that our faith can be deepened, let us reflect on the most essential elements of the Sacrifice of the Mass—the bread and the wine—which will in a few moments be offered to God as the “work of human hands.” Let us leave here reflecting on the words of our Holy Father: *“Let the Christian...know the place that his work has not only in earthly progress, but also in the development of the kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel.”*

Prepared by Rev. Mr. Robert Bender