

Homily at Mass for NDI
June 28, 2012

Matthew 7:21-29

For the past three days in the Gospel readings Jesus has been telling us who we must be as Christians. If you remember, on Monday he told us that we are not to judge; we are not to judge others and we should look for the beam in our own eye instead of the splinter in our brother's. On Tuesday he told us that we are to take the narrow path; which is the most difficult path to take. Yesterday, he told us to bear good fruit; and that by the pattern of our lives; we should always bear good fruit.

Today we have a really interesting Gospel because he tells us that even if we do these things we may not enter the Kingdom Heaven. This is a Gospel reading that if we were at a Mass with the laity, we would probably resort to an exhortation on being grounded in Christ; that we need to have our entire life patterned after his and to use him as our foundation. We would try to move people away from the temptation of basing their lives on materialism, the secular world, politics and all of the kinds of things that won't last...and that would be good.

But I think for us, as clergy there is a temptation that is a little more insidious, something that we have to be aware of. It is something that I see emerging in the Church in my own diocese and throughout our country when I travel...and that is rampant clericalism.

It is a clerical posture that tries to focus everything on the cleric; service that is focused on the cleric, not the people of God. We express it when we become more focused on what we wear, what privileges we have, what the accoutrements of our particular office are and how we can create separation and distinction between ourselves and others.

I think this stems from a disordered view of the Church. It stems from a view of the Church that puts the clerics at the top, the religious beneath them and the laity at the bottom. That's not the view of the Church that Jesus had and it's not the view of the Church that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had. The Fathers of Vatican II teach us that certain people are to be celebrated, certain people are to be set apart, certain people are to be honored and special; and those people are not us, the clergy. You see at the top of the hierarchy of the Mystical Body of Christ are the poor. Then next come the laity and at the bottom we find ourselves, servants of them all. I believe based on the Gospels and the teaching from Vatican II that's the correct view of the Church.

If we can get that view of the Church then we as servants have to reflect on how we serve. Jesus tells us today that there is a big difference between doing good works and doing the will of God. Any single action can indeed be the will of God, or it can just be a good work. It all comes down to whether the servant is the center of attention or whether the servant is a sacrament, pointing to God.

So as you and I serve others, we have to ask ourselves, what are we pointing to our clothes or Christ? Are we pointing to our pride or to the poor? Are we pointing to ourselves or to salvation? Are we a sign or are we a distraction?

If we are grounded in Christ, then our foundation is built on a rock and we have to be always pointing at Jesus; we cannot point to ourselves because we are only sand. If we have that in mind as we serve, Jesus' power and authority will be present in our works. With his power and authority we can effectively convert our knowledge into concrete action, our theory into genuine practice, our theology into life. That's what it means to be an authentic and true servant, that's what it means to do the will of God. We have to be anchored in Christ...that's the key. It's a matter of being anchored in Christ, always pointing at the Father and animated by the Holy Spirit. And if we do it correctly, we disappear. We're no longer the center; God is the center.

That's who we are called to be as servants of the Church. That's who you and I should be every day of our lives. If we do that properly we will be doing the will of God and not just good works. By serving with God at the center and we won't hear Jesus say to us, "Depart from me you evildoers" but rather we will hear him say, "Well done my good and faithful servant."