

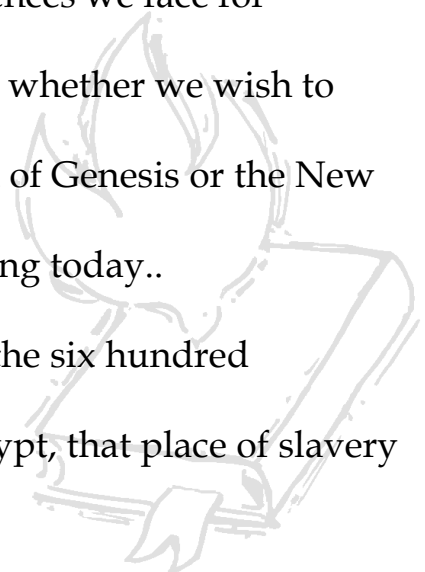
Homily
7th Sunday OT - C
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
February 23-24, 2019

1 Sm 26: 2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
Ps 103: 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13
1 Cor 15: 45-49
Lk 6: 27-38

“At that time the Israelites dispersed from there for their own tribes and clans; they set out from there each to his own heritage. In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in their own sight.” – Judges 21: 24-25

I wish to preface today’s homily by quoting the last verses from the Book of Judges, which sets up the story of David and Solomon in the books of Samuel and Kings. In order for us to understand the meaning of today’s gospel, I thought it best to tell the story of how our society preferred to follow the human leader, both in the past as well as the present, rather than the divine one that wishes us to unite with us for the rest of our existence, as well as the consequences we face for choosing the human leader over the divine one, whether we wish to follow the path of the first Adam from the Book of Genesis or the New Adam described by St. Paul in our second reading today..

As the story is told in the Old Testament, of the six hundred thousand men, chosen by God, that escaped Egypt, that place of slavery



in the Book of Exodus (Ex 12: 37), only *two* of them remained faithful to God and were permitted to re-enter the Promised Land (Joshua and Caleb). The rest of these chosen men (including Moses and Aaron), all died before they reached their destination, because of their disobedience to God. Before he died, Moses warned the next generation of Chosen People in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy that their disobedience to God would result in exile from their Promised Land. As I often quote to the students I teach, Fr. Lawrence Boadt summarized the Old Testament in one concise sentence: *Infidelity to the covenant, as given through Moses, would lead to disaster and destruction.*

So as the story is told, the next generation of Chosen People entered the Promised Land to reclaim what was once lost. As a result, each of the twelve territories (or tribes) of this Promised Land were ruled by a judge (or warlord) who mostly made the predicament in their returned land worse, not better, thus, returning to the quote that began today's homily.

As we begin this story from First Samuel and our first reading at Mass today, the Chosen People decided that they would prefer one king

to rule over them all rather than the corrupt judges that corrupted their lives in this Promised Land. Towards this cause, the Lord guided the last of these judges named Samuel to select a king that would lead these Chosen People.

As we have discussed time after time, God was saddened that the Chosen People preferred a human king over a divine one, fully knowing that every human king has faults that possibly would corrupt those they served. Nevertheless, God directed Samuel to choose a king named Saul, who proved at the outset to be a disobedient and corrupt king, disregarding the Lord's direction and often suffering the consequences from his bad choices.

When Saul's reign became so corrupt that God had no choice but to replace him, God directed Samuel to seek out a young man named David, who initially lived a virtuous life, following a code of conduct that our Lord implored us to live in today's gospel reading. On two occasions when David had the ability to slay King Saul, David spared Saul's life out of compassion and respect for the Fifth Commandment. At the end of the First Book of Samuel, Saul's life had become so corrupt

that he chose to fall upon his own sword rather than follow the new chosen king (1 Samuel 31).

As we have discussed on numerous occasions, as wonderful kings as David and his son Solomon were in serving these Chosen People, their human sin caused them to choose grave sin on numerous occasions over the life of righteousness. As we have learned in the stories of the Kings and Chronicles, only three kings in the history of the Chosen People lived righteous lives (Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah); the rest brought even more corruption and ultimately exile to a Chosen People. Only after the people repented were they allowed to return from exile to their Promised Land and even then, only 50,000 men of those who were exiled chose to return to Jerusalem, the rest preferring to remain in Babylon.

As we learn in our Church history and even the secular one, time and time again the human leader often gave in to the darker courses of their human nature and turned a good people away from their divine path. Even the good leaders had their shortcomings in life; this is the way of the human being, as illustrated to us by Adam and Eve's sin in the

Garden of Eden. This is not to say that every person acted in a perpetually evil way but this is saying that human beings (even the really good ones) make human mistakes, even human sins, which often is contrary to the direction our Lord implores us to live.

Even in today's age, we suffer from the same fate with the current leaders of our government (and sometimes Church). As we approach municipal elections this week, we often find on television advertisements that run contrary to what our Lord implores us to live in today's gospel. In the world of politics, civic leaders advertise the good that exists in themselves and the bad that exists in others. The concepts of "do unto others" and "the measure in which you measure" run contrary to the manner in which politics and their constituents often treat their opponents and others in society.

This last week, we celebrated the feast of St. Peter Damien, who lamented a thousand years ago about the crisis that existed in the Church of the eleventh century, often citing the sins of sex abuse and simony that, unfortunately, we have revisited once again in the twenty-first century. I reflected this week how the bishops gathering in the

Vatican this week would be well-served in reading the admonitions of St. Peter Damien from a thousand years ago to remind themselves of how our sinful and errant nature often repeats itself in history and the only manner in which we can rid ourselves from these evils, by following the path of God rather than the path of the human error.

This weekend around the diocese, we focus on the Catholic Ministry Appeal during a time when many good Christians in the pews might question whether they should support diocesan programs with such turmoil and bad decisions often take place within the Church leadership. If we learn nothing else from Church and secular history, we learn that these problems encountered in today's age have been revisited century upon century. I suspect that these problems most likely will rear their ugly heads repeatedly in our future, for this is the way we are destined to live if we put our focus on the human leader rather than the divine one working through the human leaders.

We learn in the story of our Church and secular history that even though each of us turns away from God at times (which is the result of our human desires taking precedent of divine guidance), God has not

lost faith in us and, even today, works through all of us to offer us a chance to be redeemed for our shortcomings. We are taught at the liturgy that God is present four ways in this “work of the people” - through the scriptures, through the sacrament, through the celebrant priest and through all of you. We realize that, even though human beings in positions of authority have their strengths and weaknesses, we did not come to Mass or support the Church because of the human leaders but because of the divine leader who works through each of us and continues to give us a path to salvation despite our human failings.

As a result, we learn that, despite the shortcomings of every human leader that serves this secular and Church community, we should never lose sight of God and the work God offers in this Church. We must look past human error and focus on the divine salvation that is offered in this Church.

I implore you on this Ministry Appeal weekend - please remember that Jesus’ words in today’s gospel implore us to serve continuously the ministries this diocese offers the needy who seek out the Lord’s direction, looking past the shortcomings of us leaders and focusing on

the Lord's grace that God wishes to offer those who seek help in these difficult times. From religious education to Catholic Charities to marriage formation to all the other services this diocese provides in God's name, we must focus on what God wishes to offer in this Church. We do this because we know that the Church is a divinely-inspired institution, led by imperfect people who ask God to look past their shortcomings in favor of the good that results from the virtuous life that Christ implores us to live.

No matter what institution we choose to follow, there will always be flaws within our leaders due to our sinful and weak human nature. Rather, let us focus on the divine goodness that wishes to work through the human being, let us make sure our lives are directed to serving the good that exists in these institutions despite that bad things that sometimes peek through that which is good and let us make sure we continue to support the Church which Jesus Christ instituted on this earth, an institution that is divinely inspired and dedicated to serve those most in need of God's mercy. Let us keep that image of God's mercy in the forefront of everything we do, in every institution that we

serve. Let us let that image of God's mercy guide us in what we do for the people that we meet. This is our prayer.