

NINTH SUNDAY [A]

Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28; Romans 3:21-25, 28; Matthew 7:21-27

Welcome back to the time of year that the Church calls “ordinary.” What is “ordinary time?” Simply put, ordinary time happens whenever it is not Advent, Christmas, Lent or Easter.

As the Church considers time these days to be *ordinary*, She also labors to get us back to the basics of Catholic belief. And today’s readings do just that; they get us back to the basics.

The First Reading today is from the [Old Testament] *Book of Deuteronomy*. This book in the Old Testament lists the lessons that Moses gave the people just before he died and just before Israel entered into the long sought after Promised Land.

Listen attentively to the promise God makes:

“I set before you here, this day, a blessing and a curse: a blessing for obeying the commandments of the Lord your God; a curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God” (Deut 11:26-27).

While far from ordinary, God’s Promise is seen properly as basic belief.

Namely, if you follow the commands of God, you will be blessed. If you refuse to listen to God’s commandments, you will be cursed.

The basics of our belief sure do sound good.

But not so fast my friend. Aren’t there a lot of good people who in fact are kind of cursed, whose lives do not go well because they fail and suffer even though they are following God’s commandments? And aren’t there far too many wicked people who brazenly despise God’s Law and yet their lives seem to go rather well as they prosper and wield influence and the like?

Sure the basics sound good, but they don’t seem to play out in life. Or do they?

Here *also* is what God’s Word says: “take these words of mind into your heart and soul” (Deuteronomy 11:18). The basics as we believe them have nothing to do with the *surface*; the basics are all about the level of our heart and soul.

God’s promised blessings have nothing to do with the *surface* of one’s life. Nor do His curses have anything to do with the *surface* of one’s life. God does not promise that if you follow His Law you are guaranteed good health, will never experience failure and always will be honored by others. No! God does not promise “worldly prosperity.”

God's Word is so much more profound and penetrating. That is to say that the basics of our belief are not about looking the part. The basics begin at the deepest level of the self, the core of our being - the place that the Bible calls the "heart and the soul."

If you dare to take to heart God's commandments ("to inscribe them on your heart"), God's blessings will astonish you. Blessings of God truly make all the difference and nothing else. The heart and soul is the level where the fulfillment of all human desire is found. And such fulfillment, when divine grace pours in like an overflowing torrent, can exist alongside and even despite the greatest experiences of (worldly) failure and intense suffering.

Conversely, if you fail to follow God's command you will be cursed at that deepest level; that is to say, anxiety, worry, fear, edginess, and emptiness will gnaw at you incessantly. Certainly, God's curse can and will coexist with great worldly gains. Someone may harbor wealth and health galore, but what lurks at the level of their heart and soul? Perhaps nothing.

I can tell you – and you can too – that there are people with worldly success who are cursed by God at the core of their being. Jesus cannot speak about this truth any more candidly than he does in today's Gospel. People who give the finger to God's commandments all-the-while smiling and role playing a part *will not enter the kingdom of heaven*.

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord'...then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

And I can tell you – and you can too – that there are people who can experience the deepest joy and peace at the level of the heart. They have nothing and yet they are filled with joy. And those who live luxuriously on the surface so deeply want what they have, those who do not have it long to find a deep and abiding inner peace and joy, meaning and fulfillment.

- Ordinary time.
- Getting back to the basics.
- Blessings and curses.
- Solid bedrock and sifting sand.

If you are rooted in God at the level of your heart and your soul, then you can withstand anything. Why? Because you are connected to the power of God! The storms will come and the tide will rise and they will not touch you.

And rest assured that the one who does not take God's commands to heart will be like the fool who built his home upon shifting sand and lose it all *forever*. So Jesus explains the Book of Deuteronomy to us.

If you are grounded in your heart and soul by God's Word you can and will withstand anything and everything.

Upon what are you building your life?