Homily for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026 Year A

Today's Gospel is one of those that it is very difficult to preach upon, for it contains those very hard and mysterious words of Christ's, "For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough, but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

How do you even begin to reconcile that very severe image of Christ and the idea of God that it implies, with those other images that are more amenable to us, a Christ and a God who is infinitely loving, merciful, and forgiving.

There is a clash, if not indeed a contradiction, and yet we must come away from listening to such a Gospel at least having tried to grasp the truth or meaning of what Christ was trying to convey to us. And so, what we attempt to do is provide some sort of explanation that is logically consistent and hangs together.

One such explanation would be that God is certainly infinitely merciful, but that he is also infinitely just, and that His Mercy is tempered by His Justice. Full stop.

As it stands that is perfectly acceptable and will satisfy some people, and so they will go ahead and lead moderately religious and moral lives, trusting more that God's justice must guarantee their Salvation, rather than His Mercy.

But then there are also some people who, because of circumstances of their lives, desperately need a reason to Hope, and for them God's infinite Mercy is far more important than any idea of His Justice.

So, you see that an explanation such as God's Mercy is tempered by His Justice can't fully and adequately explain the apparent contradicting images of Christ and God that confront us in today's Gospel. At a certain level such an explanation does express truth. We can't deny that God is merciful and just, but that's not the whole picture, for any idea of God living in an eternal tension between perhaps following the merciful impulses of His heart or the Just dictates of His head, cannot be God, it is an impoverished image of God.

Now I would tend to come away from such as today's Gospel with a more profound lesson of Christ ringing in my ears, his often-forgotten words "My ways are not your ways."

The more that I reflect upon that, the more aware I become that I, and not just I, but you and I, fashion and shape our image and concept of God to that with which we are most comfortable, that perhaps satisfies the limits of our intelligence or our emotional needs.

But here in today's Gospel we see a concept of Christ, and of God that has an infinite capacity to surprise us, that perhaps turns our comfortable images upside down. Our problem is that Human words, images, and ideas come nowhere close to touching, let alone explaining, the infinite richness of God, and the will and the ways of God.

Human words are not only limited in themselves, but they also limit what they attempt to describe. But that's the best that we have got, that's all that we can do, work with and through our words and images to struggle with the Mystery that is God. The likes of today's Gospel is useful because it should alert me to the fact that time and time again I must remind myself that I haven't got the complete picture, that I don't have and cannot have the perfect answers, at least this side of Eternity.

I very much need to remind myself that not only did God make me in His own image and likeness, but that unconsciously I also tend to fashion God, and even the human Christ into my own image and likeness. And some people end up with very strange images of God indeed. Nothing can be more misconceived than a narrow, rigid, dogmatic, personal, or institutional religious faith that claims to have all the answers, that sees the world, its problems and solution in terms of black and white, that claims a monopoly of Truth, that has God neatly tied up in a box.

Such a God is an impoverishment of the concept of God, and certainly leaves no room for the God who has that infinite capacity to surprise us, and often delightfully surprise us. It's a mistake to limit what is limitless.

A great German Dominican mystic of the 13 Century called Eckhart wrote that "the last and highest leave-taking is when we take leave of God for the sake of the God beyond God." And by that he meant that no matter how beautiful and vivid, consoling and inspiring our ideas about God are, they are not God, they are only images of God. And God only begins as it were where these images and ideas peter out and fail. The real God is beyond our image of God, and it was the painful paradoxical experience of the greats Saints and mystics that they found themselves utterly stripped of their images of God as a preparation for a deeper encounter with God himself.

Now such rare and exalted and painful graces are not for most of us during our lives; we do need and have to operate within the limits of images and words.

Back to the Gospel and it points to the infinite variety and richness of God who says to us it can be both ways. If you do have and do need images of me, I will enrich you and give you even more and you will have more than enough. But I also choose to enrich some by stripping away even what few images they have left. God can enrich in both the act of giving and in the act of taking away, and if we ourselves cannot understand that, it simply points to the impoverishment of our own image and understanding of God. My ways are not your ways.

The value of such as today's Gospel is that by making us think, by challenging us with a perhaps painful contradiction, we become more alert not only about how God deals with us, but also about how we deal with and think about God.

God Himself will never fail us, but we need more and more to see the real distinction between God Himself and our understanding and image of God, of God's will and God's ways, because it is very often the poverty of our idea of God that fails us and puts us on the path of contradiction and pain. To come to understand that is perhaps one of the best lessons that we can draw out of those hard and painful words of Christ in today's Gospel. There will be times when we need to take leave of our comfortable, personal image of God, to touch the God who is beyond God.