

HOMILY SUNDAY 09 – YEAR A
Deuteronomy 10:12-13a; 11:18, 26-28, 32; Psalm 31;
Rm 1:16-17; 3:20-26, 28; Mt 7:21-27)

“A Divine Paradigm Shift”

Are you aware that our faith involves a paradigm shift?

To believe in Jesus and love like him is to enter into a whole new way of life.

Social theorists today speak about paradigm shifts. A paradigm shift is a radical movement from one way of looking at a certain reality, to a totally different way of seeing that same reality.

An example of a challenging paradigm shift happened to the Swiss watchmakers when digital technology was discovered. Realizing the awesome possibilities for the watch-making industry, the technology was offered to the Swiss watchmakers. Convinced of the superiority of their product, however, they refused the offer. Caught in their own mind-set, they were unable to make the shift to a new way of making watches. So the rights to this new technology went to Texas Instruments in the USA and a Japanese company. The rest is history – the Swiss watchmakers lost 70% of their business almost overnight.

The readings today take us through a divine paradigm shift. The focus of the first reading, and of the Old Testament, is the Law, or Torah. Moses encourages and admonishes the Chosen People to walk in the ways of the Lord, to keep the commandments and decrees of the Lord their God, to diligently observe the statutes and ordinances that he is setting before them. Holiness, faithfulness, for the people of the Old Testament, lay in keeping the Law.

One who took this prescription seriously was Saul of Tarsus. A strict Pharisee, educated in the law, he thought it his duty to persecute and imprison the followers of Jesus in the early days of the Church. Then he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. That encounter turned Saul’s whole life upside down. He encountered the Risen Lord who simply asked him why he was persecuting him in his followers, and gave him instructions to take him through the three days of blindness that followed that life-changing encounter.

The transition for Saul was total. He went from persecuting the followers of Jesus, to becoming the most ardent follower himself. He went from almost fanatical commitment to the Law, to total belief in the person of Jesus as the New Law, the New Torah. Holiness now for Saul meant not keeping the Law, but following a person, Jesus of Nazareth, the Risen Lord, and entering into a loving relationship with Jesus. In the words of Sr. Teresita Kambeitz osu., who took a sabbatical tour in the footsteps of St. Paul, Saul fell in love with Jesus. An indication of the depth of this transition, this paradigm shift, was that even his name changed from Saul to Paul.

While the second reading moves us from Law to Faith in Jesus, the gospel now moves us into a deeper relationship of love for Jesus and the Father. Our faith in Jesus now takes us into a single-minded focus on doing the will of the Father, which is simply to love God with our whole being, and to love others as we love ourselves – as Jesus has loved us. Anything short of that ability to love, even miraculous deeds of power, falls far short of this divine call, this paradigm shift.

So there we have it – the divine paradigm shift to which we are all called as followers of Jesus. To move from Law, to faith in Jesus as the Risen Lord, to doing the will of the Father which is simply to love one another as he has loved us.

In the end, at the end of our lives, we won't be asked what great things we have done. Jesus will simply ask us, "Where are our wounds? Where are the signs that we have loved till it hurts?" That, and that alone, is the great criteria by which we will be weighed and hopefully not found wanting.

In the words of Hurs von Balthasar, we must listen to the complete and indivisible Word if we want to understand what God says to us. Above all, we must accept God's free grace that Jesus' redemptive work earned for us through the blood he shed. Even the Law points to the pre-eminence of the free grace of God. No charism can replace obedience to the word of Christ that asks only for love of God, others and one's self.

A simple example of a divine paradigm shift in daily life, a different, faith-filled loving way to handle problems, is that of an elderly couple in small town Ontario. Schoolchildren were cutting across their lawn, wearing an ugly path in it. At first this only annoyed the couple. But soon annoyance turned into anger. The couple knew something had to be done. The situation was wrecking their peace of mind. After praying about this problem, the elderly couple came up with a beautiful solution. They put crushed gravel on the path, lined it with flowers, and set a bench next to it. Then on afternoons, when school let out, they sat on the bench and greeted the children. The children responded wonderfully. They thanked the couple for the path and sat down and chatted with them. New relationships between the elderly couple and the children began to blossom that continued for years. What a grace-filled contrast from what could have been an ugly confrontation and bitter struggle!

The Eucharist we celebrate today is itself a transformative event. Humble gifts of bread and wine become for us the Body and Blood of Christ, the Risen Lord. Nourished by word and sacrament, we are empowered to go out and be a force for transformation in our world.

So let us follow Jesus into a new way of living and loving that will be a healing and transformative influence in our world that needs it so badly. May God bless us all. Amen.