

14th Sunday Ordinary Time

July 7-8, 2018

Readings: Ezekiel 2:2-5; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Mark 6:1-6

Of all the words that are used to describe young people and adolescents, the term “rebellious” often rises to the top. I have always felt that was a bit strong and surely do not approve of broad generalizations. However, recognizing that there is certainly some truth in generalizations, it may be spiritually beneficial to take a good look at our own tendencies towards rebelliousness. Surely, we recognize that this characteristic is not limited to the young, even if they may appear to exhibit it more often.

Rebelliousness flows from an inner sense of a lack of justice in a situation. If I feel that those in authority are acting unjustly, I will recoil from that. I may not be in a position to do anything about it, at which point I must suffer the injustice, perceived or real.

Why do people rebel against the Church? Historically, the reasons are legion, some legitimate, and others are poor excuses for wishing to be freed from moral or doctrinal demands. The great 14th century Catholic writer Dante Alighieri rebelled against what he saw as serious flaws in the authenticity of the leaders of the Church.

Looking back so many centuries later, we would agree with much of what he said. In the 14th century, attempts were made to find heresy within the *Divine Comedy*, and a different work of his *De Monarchia* was burned at Bologna by papal order. But subsequent Church authority affirmed his orthodoxy.

I'll never forget what went through my mind when living in Rome and seeing such beautiful buildings all around me, some of the most amazing architecture you can imagine.

One such building now houses a number of Vatican offices.¹ The ancient marbles of Colosseum and other monuments were used for its building. It took 28 years (1485-1513) to create this pearl of Roman Renaissance architecture. The problem is however, at one point in history, this became the residence of a single Cardinal from one of Rome's wealthiest families. Imagine if you lived in Rome in the early 16th century- might you conclude that the clergy had lost their way, that their lives did not reflect the example of Jesus?

I use this as a simple example because I think it is important to qualify and clarify different senses of rebellion. Our nations' founders rebelled against the tyranny of the British Crown, giving birth to America 242 years ago. Old Testament prophets called leaders to task for departing from the ways of the Lord.

Rebellion against God himself is of a completely different order than rebellion against tyranny or the calling out of hypocrisy in clergy expected to avoid living extravagantly. Rebellion against God is a result of Original Sin and the exercise of free will to turn against the ways of the Lord, preferring instead our own designs, our own desires. It is extremely dangerous for the soul, and we must face the reality that persistent rebellion may lead to the loss of our soul.

So why do people rebel against God? Again, there are many reasons, but I think one growing phenomenon I see is a sadness in trying to live the Gospel message. People brought up in the faith find it too demanding, become frustrated and lose hope. Our sins ought never to leave us hopeless, even if we are frustrated at our seeming lack of progress. The idea of "going it alone" has a natural attraction until we see just how lonely that road will become. As our Catechism teaches us, "Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become 'like

¹ Palazzo della Cancelleria, designated as one of the extraterritorial Properties of the Holy See.

gods,' knowing and determining good and evil."² Now we have come to the crux of the issue- rebellion is ultimately seeking to determine good and evil, and the resentment when coming face to face with demands placed upon us by another.

Yes, the demands that God places upon us in his moral law are serious and challenging, but never beyond our ability. Saint Paul says in our second reading: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." The Council of Trent, declared: "God never commands the impossible, but by commanding He instructs you both to do what you can, and to pray for what you cannot, and he gives his aid to enable you; for his commandments are not heavy, his yoke is sweet and his burden light."³

We in the Church need the faithful laity more than ever before, demanding of us a priestly ministry that is faithful and calling us to an authentic form of life in Christ. Where there is corruption in the Church, it must be rooted out and I for one have come to believe that the lay faithful will lead those efforts. Our faith teaches that the lay faithful "have the right and even at times a duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church ... and with consideration for the common good and the dignity of persons."⁴

² See Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 1850.

³ See Council of Trent, Session VI, 13 January 1547, chap. 11 (Denzinger,804)

⁴ See, CCC Paragraph # 907 citing the Code of Canon Law, CIC, can. 212 § 3.