

Commentary for the 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time B



The Reason for our Optimism--Jesus Always “Yes”

“Jesus Christ, whom Silvanus, Timothy and I preached to you is not alternatively ‘yes’ and ‘no’. He is never anything but ‘yes’” With these words from our second reading for this Sunday, 2 Corinthians 1:18-22, we come to a fuller understanding of Christian optimism.

I want to begin with today’s Gospel. The reading paints a vivid scene of the all encompassing “yes” of the Lord. Jesus was in a house with a thatched roof. Crowds were gathering around Him. There were so many people there that the number was spilling outside. Some were there to learn from him. These were His disciples. Some were there to challenge Him. These were the scribes, those professional interpreters of the Law of Moses. But most of the people were there to be healed by Him. Four men came up to the house carrying a stretcher. Their friend, a paralytic, lay on it. They couldn’t possibly get through the door, but they looked up and saw that the roof of the house was made of thatch. So they climbed up onto the roof, carried up their friend, then took the roof apart and lowered their friend in front of Jesus. Jesus realized that physical healing wasn’t all the paralytic needed. He needed spiritual healing. He needed to have his sins forgiven. In fact, he needed that more than anything else. So the first words the Lord had for him is, “Your sins are forgiven.” The scribes objected: Only God, or the Messiah of God, the Christ, could possibly forgive sins. To demonstrate that He was the Messiah, Jesus then cures the man. Isaiah said that there would be signs of the Messianic Presence: the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the crippled will walk and the poor will have the good news preached

to them. This was the all encompassing “yes” of Jesus Christ. The man was healed spiritually and physically.

And it is the same with us. When we commit ourselves to the Lord and continue to choose Him in our lives, this choice turns every aspect of our lives into a resounding “yes”. That is Christian optimism.

This is important for us to remember in these days when jobs are difficult to hold on to, houses are lost, and lifestyles are forced to change.

There is more to life than the present difficulties. There is the spiritual “Yes” of Jesus Christ. Recently I heard a commentator mention the obvious, as they usually do. She said that the present economic condition in our country should lead people to re-consider their perception of their self-worth.

Self-worth has got to flow from whom they are and not from what they own. It is sad, but this would be a radical change for many Americans. Many Americans equate the success of their lives with the size of their bank accounts, their houses, cars or other material possessions. The present economic situation has led many to question their lives, their self-worth, their very understanding of whom they are. Without monetary success, with less and less material possessions, many simply no longer know who they are.

That should not be the case with the committed Christian, with we who are here now. We know who we are. Our value, our dignity, our meaning in life comes from Jesus Christ. It is all “Yes” for us. Jesus Christ is all yes. Our union with Jesus Christ is all that matters regardless of what is happening around us.

Jesus Christ is the reason for our optimism. Even when tragedy strikes, even when a loved one falls gravely ill and then passes on, we remain optimistic. The yes of Christ is so much greater than the pain of death. Even though we grieve we still know that with Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ, our loved ones live. We believe in the existence of the spiritual. We believe that those who die will live forever in the love of the Lord. Yes, we miss them terribly. Yes, we grieve deeply. But we also know that they are in peace. We believe that the souls of the faithful departed, our loved ones, continue to love us and themselves guide us through their own prayers to the Divine Lover. We believe that a time will come when we will be with them again.

It is all positive with the Lord. We follow our consciences. We choose that which is proper and moral,

not that which is popular but immoral. Does that mean that there are a lot of “no’s” in our lives, like “No getting drunk, No sex outside of marriage, No hating others.” Yes, we limit our actions to avoid the negatives of life, but we do that so we can live in the positives of life. And by doing this, by living morally we simplify our lives. Did you ever notice the chaos that comes into our lives when we sin? When we sin, life gets complicated. As an example, consider lying. Who did we tell that lie to?

What other lies do I now have to tell to cover the first lie up? Who knows what about it, about me? It is the same with all sin. When we sin, be it a lie or any sin, we complicate our lives. That is why the Bible equate sin with chaos. But when we just stick to what our conscience is telling us, when we stick to the Lord, life is simple, and we are happy. God brings order in chaos. He replaces complication with peace. No matter what the world throws at us, if we are true to our Christian core, we will be at peace with God, with ourselves and even with others. It is all yes with the Lord.

There is no doubt that many people misuse freedom. Perhaps when they go off to college or the service, or perhaps earlier, in high school or even in middle school, many get involved in the pagan lifestyle. The pagan lifestyle is the deification of the physical, the turning of money, stuff, and selfishness into gods. The pagan lifestyle assumes that happiness can be bought. The pagan lifestyle results in people being in turmoil. But Jesus Christ is far more powerful than the forces of the world. When through the Grace of God, we just put our trust in the Lord, we receive healing, and forgiveness, and peace. When we change our lifestyle to that of a Christian, we don’t feel that we have given up anything other than turmoil. There is no “no” with the Lord. It is all “yes”, all peace, His peace.

When we pray the Mass, we give our struggles over to the Lord. We let God transform our difficulties into occasions of prayer. We need to trust God. He is not alternatively yes and no. He is always yes.

Fr Joseph Pellegrino SJ