

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Mark 6: 7 – 13

The minister was preoccupied with thoughts of how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with more money than they were expecting for repairs to the church building. Therefore, he was annoyed to find that the regular organist was sick and a substitute had been brought in at the last minute.

The substitute wanted to know what to play. "Here's a copy of the service," he said impatiently. "But, you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances."

During the service, the minister paused and said, "Brothers and Sisters, we are in great difficulty; the roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected, and we need \$4,000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up."

At that moment, the substitute organist played "The Star Spangled Banner." And that is how the substitute became the regular organist!

When Jesus sent the twelve out to proclaim the Gospel, they went out and preached **repentance**. Now we all know that repentance is central to the Gospel. But what does repentance mean?

Usually when we think about repentance, we identify it with some effort in self-improvement, something to make ourselves more patient and kind, some effort that will make us less judgmental or selfish.

These efforts on our part are indeed essential to repentance. But repentance is much larger and wider than these efforts on our part. Repentance is as large as the mission of Christ.

The mission of Christ is to reconcile all things to God and all people to one another.

Repentance must be understood in this light. The biblical word for repentance means to turn around, to think in a new way.

So, if we understand repentance in its larger sense, it means that we are called to turn to a new way of understanding God and understanding others. And since we define our relationship to God through our understanding of others, the primary call of repentance is to heal the divisions that separate us one from another.

When we hear the call to repent, the first thing we should ask is who are the people from whom I am estranged in my family, in my community, in this world? Are there people I hate? People I resent? People who I dismiss or demean?

And how can I turn around and see these people in a new way, a way that will facilitate God's kingdom? Now when we look at repentance in this way it is not easy. There are all kinds of reasons we would choose to keep ourselves apart from others.

We have been hurt. We all carry prejudices that tag others as unworthy of our trust. We have all kinds of reasons why we should let the divisions among us remain. So how is it possible that we can overcome those inclinations and heal our divisions?

A young priest was assigned to be the new pastor of a small rural tightly-knit community. The previous pastor had been there for 30 years and was deeply loved. This made it very difficult for the new priest to be accepted.

There was one particular woman who had been very close to the previous pastor. She wanted nothing to do with the new priest. Every time he made a suggestion to do something she would oppose it. Every time he preached she would disagree.

She continuously stirred the pot of discontent within the parish. Within a very brief time a great deal of distrust and hurt had developed between this priest and his parishioner.

Now because this community was so small, it was the practice that every year the pastor would visit each member of the assembly in their own home. The priest dreaded the thought of going to visit this difficult woman.

But when her name came up he steeled himself and set out. He drove up to her house and paced for awhile in the front yard building up the courage to knock on the door. Finally, he took a deep breath walked up the steps and knocked. No answer. This was good news to the priest. He was hoping he could just leave his card and go away. But he thought he should knock again. He did, and again no answer.

But he heard a small sound inside, and that caused him to worry. Perhaps the woman had fallen or suffered a stroke. She might need help. So, he knelt down and looked in through the keyhole to see if there was anything amiss. To his surprise, he saw an eye looking back at him.

Then from within the woman said with a chuckle, “Well Father, I guess this is the first time that you and I have seen eye to eye.” To which the priest responded, “Yes, and we had to get down on our knees to do it.”

When we are called to repent, to heal the divisions between us, it is not something we can do on our own. We have to get down on our knees to ask for God’s help. The hurts and the prejudices are often too deep for us to overcome them by our own strength.

Moreover, the ability to understand and forgive depends on a change not only in us but in the other person. Over that we have little control.

If repentance is to happen, God must be involved in it. Therefore, think today of the prejudices you carry, of the relationships in your life that are broken, and open yourself to the grace of repentance. AMEN.