



The Holy Spirit – Our Guide to the Truth
Homily 26th Sunday Ordinary Time (A) – 2008
September 2008
Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of San Antonio

My sisters and brothers in Christ:

First of all, let me welcome again our guest, the member of the 'Fellowship of Catholic Scholars' that are finishing their Annual Convention in San Antonio. I hope that you enjoyed your time among us and that your convention was a great success.

The theme of your conference 'Conscience, Cooperation and Complicity' refers to an important aspect of Catholic life at this time in our country.

It is always important for Catholics to have a well formed conscience, but these days we are living are even more a demanding time. We are preparing for a presidential election and we are in the middle of a serious economic crisis so, our time demands a well formed conscience to make good decisions as we actively participate in the future of our country.

For all Catholics, forming a conscience begins by seeking out what is good and true, not what is convenient or trendy. We will find truth in Scripture and the teachings of the church. We must honestly consider the facts and through prayerful reflection open our hearts to God's will.

As Catholics, we must act with a conscience that is properly informed and formed through education in the faith, the assimilation of the Word of God and the teachings of the church.

Jesus promised us that he would not leave us orphans, but would send us the advocate, "The Spirit of Truth" to guide us to all truth, so the process of formation of conscience 'is supported by gifts of the Holy Spirit and helped by the advice of wise people.' (CC 374)

The readings of today's Mass contain a couple of important elements in the formation of our conscience: truth and freedom; the importance of the practice of the virtue of truthfulness and the good understanding of freedom.

The passage of the Gospel it is an interesting parable. A man had two sons. He asked them to work in the vineyard. He invites them to do it. One says no, but he goes to work and the other says yes and he doesn't go!

I'm sure that you have already notice that they were free and that they didn't act in a truthful, honest way.

My sisters and brothers we have received the gift of freedom but we have also called to be honest and practice the virtue of truthfulness.

The main reason to try to practice the virtue of truthfulness is the fact that we are Catholics, followers of Jesus Christ, who is the truth, the life and the way.

We are people who are trying to imitate Jesus' life, as St. Paul encourages us to do in today's 2nd reading: "Have in you the same attitude that is also in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that "Truth or truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, and in guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy" (CCC, 2468).

As Jesus says in St. Matthew's Gospel: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more that this comes from evil"

In today's passage of the Gospel there is not a clear testimony of truthfulness by either one of the sons. We have to ask for the grace to be more honest and truthful in our personal life and in our participation in family, social and public life.

Not that we'll never make a mistake or lack truthfulness, but we the determination of living by the truth and having the humility of asking for forgiveness, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, if we fail to live by the truth.

That is exactly what we learn from the first reading of today's Mass. The Prophet Ezekiel states that if a sinful person turns from a life of sin and does what is right, eternal life will be the reward. At the same time the Prophet makes the point that God judges us according to the choices we make,

because, he states, a virtuous person who turns from a life of virtue to a life of sin, will be punished.

My brothers and sisters, there is always room for repentance. God is a merciful God who is always ready to forgive us and to give us a new opportunity to begin again: the tender mercy of our God!

But then, there is the other aspect in today's Gospel. The two brothers are free and they will do whatever they want!

The two of them are free. One of them makes the right decision the other the wrong. "Which of the two did his father's will? They answered, 'the first'"

This is also our life. We are invited to imitate the life of Christ, to live according to his teachings but God who has given us the gift of freedom. God gives us the option to say yes or no.

In today's passage of the Gospel, the obedience of the first one is rewarded, as it is the obedience of the ones who listen to John the Baptists and had a conversion. They will enter the kingdom of heaven. Not the other ones because they didn't listen or believe in the call for conversion.

The reality of our human nature is that we are creatures of God...and that freedom is a wonderful gift that God has given to us. It is a treasure that belongs to Christianity: 'the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom 8,21): "men's supreme dignity lies in this, that they are directed towards the good by themselves, and not by others" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Friends of God, 27).

But real freedom it's not only the possibility of doing whatever we want. The use of freedom, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, consist basically in desiring and doing good, and not in choosing between good and evil; 'to will evil is not freedom or any part of it, though, it is a sign of freedom'.

It is the capacity of being united with God counting on our own will. In the words of Pope John Paul II: "Jesus tells us that the purpose of our freedom is to say 'yes' to God's plan for our lives. What makes our 'yes' so important is that we say it freely ... Jesus teaches us that we are accountable to God, that we must follow our consciences, but that our consciences must be formed according to God's plan for our lives" Pope John Paul II, Denver 1993.

The coming weeks are important for each one of us and for our country. Let's make sure that we work on having a well formed conscience that in truth and freedom we can exercise our civic rights and duties.

Mary, Our Blessed Mother is a wonderful example for us to say yes to God with absolute freedom and to obey to God's will out of love as she says to the Angel at the Annunciation: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it done to me according to your word".

May She intercede for us that we can have the grace of God to work in the vineyard of the Lord knowing the beauty of the truth, acting with absolute freedom and in loving obedience to God. Amen.