

Cooperation for Redemption Second Week in Ordinary Time Friday, March 17, 2017
7:30 PM Gn 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; **Mt 21:33-43, 45-46** (St. Patrick, bishop)
(Healing Mass) (Do we understand that our daddy is delighted in us?)

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

This is a quotation from the Old Testament, and it expresses **a pattern that can be found throughout history, and** not only throughout history, but **in our own personal lives. Joseph** was such a stone rejected and he became the cornerstone, the cornerstone of a whole new society that developed in Egypt under his direction and served as a shelter for all the victims of famine who took refuge in Egypt, among them Joseph’s own family. **Jesus** was another stone rejected.

Now you have to think of for a moment and perhaps if you visit the **ancient world**, you will see something about stones, and that is remarkable architecture. **Stones are fit together with no mortar.** How did they do this? I don’t know, but they did, fabulous work, but they couldn’t use everything, so **stones got rejected. They couldn’t be fit.** Obviously they had ways of cutting them, but I don’t know what they used.

Now the stones rejected become the cornerstone because God is always doing something new and we have all kinds of plans, and they might be actually pretty good, but we don’t have any idea what God is doing. **So we reject stones because they don’t fit with our plans, but they do fit with God’s plan.** And if that is true in the world and in history, it’s also true in our own personal lives. Our lives are made by God. We may not appreciate all of our circumstances and indeed we actually may be to some degree imprisoned by circumstances that are of other people’s construct, other people’s will; and they may be opposing God. **So our circumstances are not necessarily from God, and yet God can work with everything.** We may look at ourselves and not even appreciate or even like aspects of our personalities or build up or character or makeup, but we are good and we are fashioned by God; and it is **often the very thing we think is least desirable about ourselves that God uses as the foundation for something new** that we never even thought about. So we have to keep in mind these patterns and how what we reject is often exactly what God uses to restore us.

Now the story of Joseph is a very interesting one. It’s almost sardonic because **Joseph’s brothers are willing to sell him into slavery** because “after all he’s our flesh and blood.” Wasn’t that very touching? Instead of just leaving him in the cistern or killing him we are going to be really nice. We are going to sell him into slavery. And this is of course the way many slaves got to be slaves: **kidnapping.** In fact the blacks that came to this country were kidnapped in Africa and brought here, victims of kidnapping. That was one way you could end up as a slave. **Another way you could end up as a slave was to get into such debt you couldn’t pay back.** This type of bondage, that’s what the word bond, bondage means, a debt you can’t pay back. That type of thing is often found in different stories in the gospels. And **the biblical writers use both slavery and bondage to talk about our condition,** vis-à-vis God and God’s mercy and God’s presence and God’s life, because when a person is in **bondage, and that means he owes somebody else, then all his work doesn’t belong to him.** It belongs to the person he owes. That’s what bondage is. Work and work and work and work, never get anything. All the benefits go to someone else.

Now **that kind of bondage exists in the world today in many situations**, where no matter what people do and how much they work and what effort they put in, they do not prosper. **Someone takes all of the fruit of their labor.** They are in bondage. It's not the will of God. Now you may say, oh but we have laws for bankruptcy, so if you get into debt, you can be declared bankrupt. Well, yes, you can if you're able to do that, but there are **different ways of getting into bondage and there's different forms of debt.** And we need to think about them in a very open way because the message of the gospel is addressed to us that we might find freedom.

Now freedom from a bond or from bondage is called remission. A bond is remitted. Now you have heard of **the remission of sins.** The apostles were sent into the world to preach the remission of sins. **That means that we can get out of this situation where we never really get ahead: physically, financially, spiritually, mentally, every way.** It has to do with the whole person, how the whole human person can be captured. Slavery—there is still slavery. Not only is there slavery of people who are actually kidnapped and forced into prostitution, for example, but there's also the **slavery of addiction to drugs, to substances, to sex.** Those are all forms of slavery. **When God's grace works in us he redeems us from that slavery.** That's the word redemption. And **the work of Christ is to redeem** and to remit and to free and to liberate all people from all the ways in which darkness envelops them and controls them and doesn't let them be. **And toward this end he uses sometimes the parts of ourselves that are most damaged that we want to get rid of.** No, he doesn't want to get rid of it, our damaged parts. **He wants to heal them and use them to build something that's his,** his creation within us. And it's in this manner that we actually become free, even though it seems paradoxical. But St. Thomas teaches that we are only really free when we are doing what God wants. Why? Well, we are created to do what God wants. We are created to be children of God. **We are created to live God's life and we are really only free when we are doing that.** Any other time we are in some form of bondage or slavery. So ultimately all sin is a kind of bondage or slavery. But the good news of the gospel is that God intends to free us all from all of it.

But we do have to cooperate. And cooperation begins by trying to really sense what Jesus is trying to say. Jesus is always talking about the Father, who is just this wonderful daddy, who is just so delighted in his children. **Do we understand that our daddy is delighted in us?** We may not be delighted in ourselves, but that's because we don't see. The Father does see. This is another way of saying we don't know what's really true. The Father does. **Jesus talks about the Spirit that he sends into our hearts and minds and bodies to give divine life,** divine light, divine power. He really means that as a gift, but then we have to actually accept the gift. **We cannot accept the gift if we are always relying on how we feel.** The Holy Spirit is so often way beyond feeling. So as St. Paul says, "We live by faith, not by sight." We live by faith, not by feeling. And I would have to add we live by faith, not by experience. Experience can be good at times, but a lot of times our experience is darkness, suffering, the dark night. And in those times **we have to be people of faith and trust that in spite of our experience,** in spite of what we see, in spite of what we hear, **we do really believe that God is with us** and God is now touching us and extending God's own life to us that we may be with God for all eternity.