

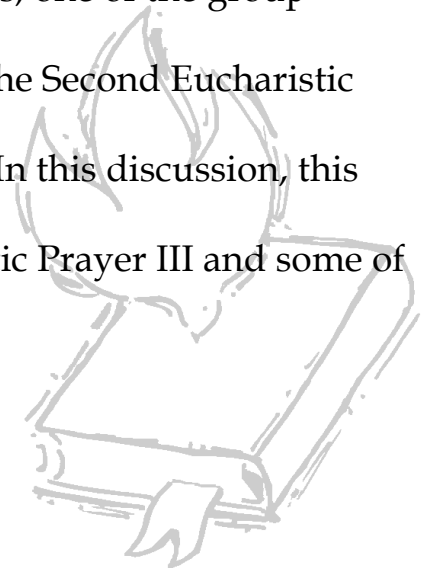
**Homily**  
**21<sup>st</sup> Sunday OT - C**  
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
August 24-25, 2019

Is 66: 18-21  
Ps 117: 1-2  
Heb 12: 5-7, 11-13  
Lk 13: 22-30

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As some of you may know, for the last twenty-three years as a priest, I have been following my daily Mass schedule with a time of fellowship with local parishioners, learning about the stories of faith and solving the problems of the world. For me, I almost enjoy the weekday Masses more than the ones on the weekend because during the weekdays, I get the opportunity to spend more quality time with the people that come to Church. The weekday Mass crowd is a close-knit group who spend time in adoration after Mass and through the day; our time of fellowship often extends through the breakfast hours.

During one of our morning breakfast sessions, one of the group inquired as to why I seemed very set on using the Second Eucharistic Prayer quite often during the summer months. In this discussion, this parishioner talked about the merits of Eucharistic Prayer III and some of



the charisms of that prayer, as opposed to the shorter one that I have been using.

My gut response to this question is to tell my breakfast companions that I was a lazy priest and that the short prayers for me are better, but there is a theological reason that I employ this specific prayer, especially during in Ordinary Time and in light of a recent Church feast that we just celebrated. The reason that I enjoy the Second Eucharistic Prayer so much is that its inspiration, most likely, dates back to the third century from the writings of a character named St. Hippolytus, whose feast day we celebrate, in conjunction with Pope St. Pontian, on August 13<sup>th</sup>.

Now I do not claim to be as intelligent as this third century saint (he was considered one of the greatest theologian of his particular era). However, whenever I pray Eucharistic Prayer II, whenever I make a theological or pastoral mistake in the Church, I remind myself of Hippolytus' legacy, one that is filled with great suffering due significant heresies this theologian held late in his life. In fact, I find it ironic that the person to whom Hippolytus directed some of his greatest venom was the person with whom St. Hippolytus was imprisoned by the

emperor of Rome in 235, the pope of the time name St. Pontian.

Ultimately, both of these future saints were exiled by the Roman government to the island of Sardinia in the year 235, where they both suffered a martyr's death. It was during this time that Hippolytus recanted his heretical beliefs and reconciled himself with the teachings of the faith.

The story of Hippolytus is quite noble and very much parallels the theme of the gospel reading from today. Hippolytus truly believed that the doors to heaven were very narrow and only those who had a true sense of the faith would be permitted to enter. Hippolytus believed that those whose faith was empty or unorthodox would never be permitted through the doors, and his writings, as a result, were extremely forceful and deliberate.

The heresy in question during the early third century involved the manner in which we understand the Trinity. The heresy was called *Seballianism* or *Modalism*, which claimed that there was only one God, though God wore three "masks," so to speak, as if to change his appearance as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church

eventually condemned these heresies, though she was slow and deliberate in doing so. Hippolytus tried to reconcile the issue in a more forceful and expeditious manner, but his rebuttal became too heretical in the *other* direction, arguing that the and the Son were separate Gods, that the Father *created* the Son at the beginning of time and that the Son was subordinate to the Father. There are many heretical statements in Hippolytus' position, two of which are called *Tritheism* and *Subordinationism*.

Because of his position, Hippolytus fought strenuously against four popes of the time: Pope Zephyrinus, St. Pope Callistus, Pope Urban and St. Pope Pontian. The argument became so heated that Hippolytus left the Church at one point and declared himself the "true-pope" or an "anti-pope" as the Church called him, someone who tried to break from the Church and claimed that his beliefs were the only ones that should be followed. If I am correct, this was the first cited instance where an anti-pope formally was recognized as a saint in the history of the Church.

It was his battle with Pope St. Pontian that cost both Hippolytus and Pontian their lives. The emperor of Rome at the time, a harsh leader named Maximinus, persecuted all leaders of the Church, and as a result, exiled both Pope Pontian and Hippolytus to the island of Sardinia, where both men were enslaved in the mines of that country until the time of their death. During this time, Pontian and Hippolytus recognized the need for reconciliation so that the unity of the Church would be restored, so Hippolytus renounced his claim as pope and his heretical views of the faith as well. Pope Pontian also resigned as Holy Father so that another could take his place (as a result, Pontian holds the distinction of being the first pope to retire, which has happened rarely in the history of the Catholic Church, most notably by Pope Celestine V in 1296 and, more recently, Pope Benedict earlier this year). Because both men were willing to admit their mistakes and because both suffered a great penance for their sins, the Church today recognizes them both as honorable martyrs of the faith and celebrates their feast days together.

Whenever I pray Eucharistic Prayer II, I remind myself of the story of Hippolytus, a story that is a reminder of a faith that should not be held

lightly or taken for granted. It is our salvation that is at stake in this relationship with God and only those who adhere to the faith will be allowed to enter the gates of heaven. Hippolytus and Pope Pontian gave their lives to defend this faith. We learn in our gospel today that those who defend the faith will be allowed to enter the sheep gate, for they are the ones who have taken Christ's words to heart and have lived the faith that they profess to believe.

In today's age, we understand that Christ is the sheep gate in our lives as well; only those lambs among us that follow their shepherd will enter the place that has been reserved for them. We need to ask ourselves how diligent we are in keeping the faith and by what means we are willing to maintain and defend the teachings of the Church. We may be exiled for our beliefs, we may even suffer a martyr's death, but it is through the defense of these beliefs that we have that chance to see the light of the eternal tomorrow, the light of the Jerusalem yet to come.

I encourage all of us to remember the life of St. Hippolytus when we pray the Second Eucharistic Prayer together and the struggles that he endured during his lifetime. I encourage all of us to ask ourselves

whether we live a diligent faith or if we take the faith for granted. For the more we understand the faith and the more we live it, the clearer we can see the sheep gate that lies ahead in the life that is yet to come. This is our prayer.