

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes**  
Santa Barbara, CA

**Homily for the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
Celebrated by Our Community on Sept. 6, 2014

**Martha Siegel**

Reflections on  
**Ez 33:7-9; Ps. 95; Rom 13:8-10; and Mt 18:15-20**

Today's lessons could be approached in at least two different ways with two different sets of eyes and ears, two different pairs of glasses, two different ways of looking at God and the world, and two very different ways of understanding our spiritual lives and our religious faith.

The first of these is familiar to many of us. It's the kind of religion many of us grew up with,

the kind that is still most common today. God is imaged as a ruler, a king who judges us as worthy or unworthy and deals with us accordingly. In this approach *external authority* is very important. The specific authority may vary - the Pope for Catholics, the Bible or for Protestants - but obeying that authority is the highest good.

In this kind of religion *what you believe* is very important. Creeds and catechisms are emphasized. You need to believe the right things, the things you have been taught, the things everyone else in your church believes. And *obeying the rules* is very important. You must behave in the way you have been taught to behave. You will be judged and treated accordingly. The world is seen as *dualisms*, black or white, no grays. It is very clear what is right and wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Beliefs are either orthodox or heresy. The *boundaries* between who is in and who is out are very clear and very rigid.

If you are wearing these glasses when you read these lessons you are likely to focus on certain words like: "wicked, iniquity, transgressions, evil, commandments, judgments, do not, shall not, laws, sin, offender." You may find your judgmental buttons being pushed. You may either feel guilty yourself or you

may feel righteous and empowered to go out and shape up the world. Not altogether useful outcomes for ourselves or others.

There is another way of looking at this. You can put on a different pair of glasses. This approach to religion doesn't emphasize authority and obedience, belief and behavior, but rather *relationship and love*. It is not an external set of beliefs but rather internal experience of God, a God who loves us and accepts us just as we are and helps us grow into people who can love and accept ourselves and come to accept others, too, as the beloved of God. So from the inside out we find ourselves obeying the great commandments to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. This approach *focuses on the heart*, not the head. It makes no claims of infallibility. It's OK not to know for sure. The greatest good is love, not obedience. *Authority is more internal*, there is less dualism, and boundaries are more inclusive, open, accepting of differences.

If we put on these glasses what words might jump out? Paul's "Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law" and "The commandments ... are summed up in this word, Love your neighbor as yourself."

And Jesus's: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

*Community, relationship, love—these are the highest good.*

This way of looking at religion is ancient—as old as Jesus and the New Testament—but it got lost somewhere along the way. The *good news*, at least in my way of looking at it, is that now, in the early 21st century, this way of looking at things is making a comeback, mov-

ing from the shadows into the light of current Christian thinking.

As an example, Richard Rohr wrote this in his on-line meditation last Sunday:

In the seminary we took serious courses on *moral theology* to help us rightly discern who was good and who was bad. Unfortunately, this usually only emboldened the very judgmental mind that Jesus warned us against (see Matthew 7:1-2). Some then thought that this was the whole meaning of Christianity—religion’s purpose was to monitor and police society in regard to its morals. Religion became all about morality instead of be-

ing a result and corollary of Divine Encounter. As such, this was much more a search for control or righteousness than it was a search for truth, love, or God. It had to do with the ego’s need for certitude, superiority, and order. Is that what Jesus came for? Jesus never said, “You must be right,” or much less, “You must be sure you are *good* and right.” Instead he said, “You must *love one another*.” His agenda is about growing in faith, hope, and love while always knowing that “God alone is good.”

Which glasses will you be wearing?