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The Second Sunday of the Year (A)

With the celebration of Christmas now come to an end we find ourselves in that liturgical season so often called "Ordinary Time." What makes this time "ordinary?"

It is not because these weeks are ordinary in the usual sense of the word. These weeks are neither normal nor boring. They are ordinary because they are not quite like the feasts of Christmas and Easter, Advent and Lent included.

The Advent and Christmas seasons have as their focus the Nativity of the Lord while the Lenten and Easter seasons have as their focus his passion, death and resurrection. The Christmas and Easter feasts, then, focus on a particular aspect of the life of Christ; they are ordered, geared, structured, to certain times in the life of the Messiah. This is the sense in which these current weeks are "ordinary."

These days are not ordered or structured around a particular mystery in the life of Christ but around the totality of his life. These weeks are ordered around the celebrations of Christmas and Easter and provide for us ample opportunity to reflect upon the life of Christ, upon him "who became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

If these days are structured around the life of Christ Jesus they beg us to consider that around which we have structured our own lives. Around what does your life revolve? To what is your life ordered?

We know that, like the liturgical year, our lives are to be ordered to, geared towards, structured around the life of Jesus Christ by whom we are "called to be holy" (I Corinthians 1:2).

Our lives then are to be ordered around that which makes us holy, but what does it mean to be holy? We might first say what holiness is not. "Holiness does not consist in not making mistakes or never sinning. Holiness grows with the capacity for conversion, repentance, willingness to begin again, and above all with the capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness."<sup>1</sup>

More positively we can say that holiness consists in "friendship with Christ and obedience to his will."<sup>2</sup> It is that simple; to be holy is to be in friendship with and obedient to Christ Jesus, with him "who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Holiness is simple, yes, but it is not easy. It is not easy for us to always be in friendship with Jesus, to keep his commands and do what he tells us. Too often we think we know better he, that his view is, perhaps, rather limited, not

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 31 January 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with seminarians, 19 August 2005.

permissive enough, too restricting. And so we push and fight and rebel and order our lives not around Christ Jesus but around ourselves.

We refuse to say in humble service, "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will" (Psalm 40:8-9). Instead we order our lives around our own passions and desires.

We devote most of our time and energy toward any of the capital and deadly sins. Either we work too much and become obsessed with work or we work too little and drown in a lazy boredom. We give in to gluttony and spend much of our eating and drinking merrily or we give in to pride and spend every passing moment in dieting and exercise. Either we give in to our anger and harbor one grudge after another or we give in to lust and spend our day in a pornographic haze.

You get the picture. We order our lives not around Jesus Christ but around ourselves, all the while wondering why we are not at peace, why we are not happy, why we are not fulfilled and satisfied. It is precisely because we are not in full friendship with Christ the Lord, the Lamb of God.

We refuse to listen to Christ. All throughout our day we fill our ears with noise - with radio, television, mp3s, you name it - never leaving a quiet moment for the Lord. We can too easily echo the words of the Baptist: "I did not know him" (John 1:31).

At first, remaining quiet with the Lord is uncomfortable and difficult because he brings before us our sins and our distance from him. We like to pretend that there is nothing wrong with us. We are all good people, after all, aren't we? We may well be, but we are still sinners. Being good, after all, is not what gains access to Paradise, but friendship with and obedience to Christ.

Nevertheless, friendship with Christ is possible because, through our baptism, he who "became flesh and dwelt among us" has granted to us the "power to become children of God" (John 1:14, 12). Friendship with Christ is possible! He says to us, "You are my servant ... through whom I will show my glory" (Isaiah 49:3). But he also says to us, "It is too little ... for you to be my servant" (Isaiah 49:6). Furthermore, he says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John 15:14).

This friendship with Christ, this holiness "demands a constant effort but it is possible for all since it is not just the work of man but is above all a gift of God, who is thrice holy (cf. Isaiah 6:3)."<sup>3</sup>

We, then, like Paul, are called to invite everyone to this same friendship with Christ. Through our obedience to his will we are to become, as he said to Isaiah, "a light to the nations,

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 1 November 2006.

that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Look around right now. Are you family and friends here present with us in this church? If not, where are they? When was the last time you invited them to join you, to come with you to meet Christ Jesus and to be friends with him?

Have your family and friends left the fold of the Catholic Church and gone over to another? When was the last time you asked them to return to the one true Church that Christ established upon the rock of Peter?

This is the task of the friends of Jesus Christ: to bring all people to him that all might enjoy his friends. May each of us be able to echo the words of the Psalmist: "I announced your justice in the vast assembly; I did not restrain my lips" (Psalm 40:10).