

God calls us to live by faith in his promise. He calls us to live by faith and not by sight. So as St. Paul says, the life I live I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. The life God calls us to live depends on his promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. It therefore reflects that promise. The life God calls us to live depends on his mercy. Jesus therefore teaches us to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. Every instruction he gives to teach us how to live is followed up with that promise by which we have life in him. Don't judge, and you won't be judged. Don't condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you.

These are sure promises. According to his great mercy, God has sent his Son into the flesh to save us from sin, guilt, and eternal misery. He does not deal with us according to our sins or judge us based on our many blunders. He has turned his condemnation away for the sake of his Son's bitter suffering and death in our place. He freely forgives us, giving to us his own life, his own righteousness, and his own inheritance. It is therefore on this sure promise of our Father in heaven that Jesus guides us to think, speak, and live in him.

Jesus is teaching you what the gospel does to your life. The Holy Spirit has called you by the gospel. He has enlightened you. He has given you faith in Christ. He has given you life, just as he did for little Vivienne this morning in her baptism. And by this same gracious promise of God in Christ, he renews your mind. He causes you to think in a new way, a way this world, blinded by its own pride and unbelief, can't recognize. He transforms us in this renewal of our minds so that we may discern and judge rightly what is good, pleasing, and perfect before God.

In other words, the gospel not only gives you a heart of faith to trust in the Father through his Son Jesus Christ. It also gives you a new mind so you can balance and weigh things with his wisdom. The law is certainly wise. The law teaches us how to live. But the gospel actually gives us that life to live. We live the life of Christ who loved us and gave his life up for us. We rely on his mercy by which he has turned all judgment and condemnation away from us and forgives us of all our sins. This is therefore the measure and balance, which drives how we think and move.

Jesus describes it as good measure, pressed together, shaken down, and running over. He gives us everything we need to stand confidently before God's throne of grace. He puts it all into your lap. As David says in Psalm 23, "He anointeth my head with oil. My cup runneth over." He has prepared a table for us in his kingdom, which we enjoy even now in the midst of this evil and hostile world, as we eat his body and drink his blood for the forgiveness of our sins and nurturing of our souls.

Jesus tells us to make use of this good measure. Because the measure you use will be used for you. Forgive as you have been forgiven. Don't judge people based on your own standards. Don't write people off as lost causes. God doesn't do that with you. He doesn't keep tabs on all the ways you have messed up. He is merciful to you. So make use of it in your own life. Learn from it even as you depend on it.

The world tries to teach us what Jesus means when he says not to judge. People think that not judging means not ever saying that someone is wrong. But approving or making excuses for sin is itself making a judgment. Jesus isn't telling us never to take a stand on the truth. Instead, he is teaching us not to rely on our own notions and desires.

If you rely on your own judgments, then you might appear to make pretty good judgments at first. The world is capable of this, after all. People can know that it is wrong to commit adultery. They can know that homosexuality is wrong or even that any sex outside of marriage is wrong. You don't have to be a Christian to know that it's unnatural and perverted for two men to have sexual relations with each other. You also don't have to be a Christian to know that shacking up with your boyfriend or girlfriend is wrong. Studies even show that divorce is much more likely with those who didn't wait until marriage. And besides, moving in together without the security of marriage shows a lack of commitment. Any unbeliever, if he simply considers the facts, can come to this conclusion.

But as long as we make these judgments, however sound they may seem at first, based on our own desires and ambitions, then we are not being led by good judgment. A hundred years ago, these moral issues were not questioned nearly as much as they are now. Does that mean that everyone had better judgment? Maybe. But it doesn't mean that they had Christian judgment. Many people just go along with what is acceptable in the culture, and they avoid those things that are frowned upon. Jesus tells us to judge with right judgment, not merely to go along with what the world recognizes as right. Even in our culture of sexual liberation and moral decay, people still know that you shouldn't cheat. If you are fornicating with a girl, it's generally believed that you should stop fornicating with her before you start fornicating with someone else. Of course, both things are wrong, but at least there is still some sense of loyalty. Because even when people have rejected good judgments, they can still make other seemingly good decisions. They can still have a certain grasp of what is fair and just. They still have some standards, in other words.

But Jesus gives us much higher standards to live by. Of course, this includes keeping ourselves from these popular sins of the culture and striving to live a chaste and decent life. But even more so, Jesus is teaching us to rely on the mercy of God. Don't just say that homosexuality, fornication, drunkenness, abortion and all these other social evils are wrong. Of course, they are wrong. But seek to understand why. It's because they attack God's good work of creation. God established marriage in paradise, because he loves us. He wants us to be fruitful, and he desires to bless us in this way. It also serves as a sign and shadow of the relationship between Christ and his church. God is committed to us. He has joined himself to us in the incarnation of his Son. He also wants us to be sober so that we can set our minds on things above where Christ is seated with him as our advocate forever. He doesn't want us to depend on our own strength, emotions, feelings, and understanding, because he knows that our hearts are deceitful and will only lead us to despair. As Jesus says, the blind can't lead the blind. They will both fall into the ditch.

Jesus called sinners to himself. He welcomed them and ate with them. They sat at his feet and learned from him. They came to know from him that their prostituting, their stealing, their drunkenness, and their cheating were much worse than just taboos and social evils. They learned that they were damaging to their souls. They learned from their teacher to flee these things and find refuge from him.

The world today likes to turn violators of the law into victims. I suppose it's true that people often fall prey to hustlers and predators and are deceived into doing bad things. But if someone has sinned, it doesn't do him any good just to call him a victim. When Jesus defended the tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners from the judgment of the Pharisees, he wasn't brushing away their sin as if it wasn't that big of a deal. He wasn't teaching the sinners that they are just victims of an unfair social system. No, he taught them accountability. He taught them to judge themselves and consider their lives before the

righteous judgment of God. And it was in this way that he taught them the great mercy of God. They learned from their good teacher to take the planks out of their own eyes so that they could discern God's will more clearly.

When we condemn the popular immoral actions of today's culture, we must do so out of mercy for the weak and naïve. We must speak clearly against the sins that are promoted in the media, in entertainment, and in our own neighborhoods. Those who cheat their neighbors out of money, those who live in drunkenness, who have sex outside of marriage, kill their unborn children, advise others to do the same, engage in or promote sodomy will not inherit God's kingdom. They will be judged and condemned by God. The simple Christian needs to know this and be warned against it. The apostles of Christ warn us of this out of mercy for our souls, so that we aren't deceived and fall prey to the devil's condemnation.

Don't judge such people to be beyond any redemption. Don't assume that those who are caught up in such sins cannot be brought to repentance. Otherwise, you are no better than those who excuse their sin. Most of the time there isn't anything you can do for someone who is caught up in sin but to pray for him. Making excuses or writing people off both come from the same depressing and hopeless cynicism, which too often plagues the hearts of so many. As long as we do not recognize the near and clear danger of sin and how easily we can fall into the passions of our own corrupt desires, then we remain blinded by logs of hypocrisy sticking out of our eyes.

This is why our Lord trains us to walk by faith in his promises as we live in daily repentance. Keep a sober mind and a close watch against sin. But rely on the mercy of God. Live on his compassion. He does not judge you according to your sins or condemn you with the devil. He gives you everything you need. So imitate him as his beloved children, confident that the offering of Christ avails for your salvation.

In other words, let God's Word do the work. He gives you the wisdom to apply it. When you fail to apply it rightly, he doesn't rub it in your face. No, he continues to lead you and patiently train you with his mercy, giving you more wisdom and discernment. The measure he has given you in Christ is more than you presently have the ability to recognize. We won't fully see how much it truly overflows until Jesus returns to raise us from the dead. But until then, you can be confident that God's mercy endures, that his grace abounds, he has established peace with you, and he gives you all you need. So use it. Live by faith in the good measure of his promise. Apply his mercy to one another. Encourage one another with it. And you won't fall into the ditch. Your Lord will continue to train you until he appears. And he promises that you will be like him. Let us pray:

Oh Lord, in mercy, stay my heart  
On faith's most sure foundation.  
And to my inmost soul impart  
Thy perfect consolation.  
Fill all my life with love to Thee,  
T'ward all men grant me charity;  
And at the last, when comes my end,  
Thy succor send.  
From Satan's wiles my soul defend. Amen.