

Responsibility

The 1995 movie *Dead Man Walking* is based on Sister Helen Prejean's best selling book about the human face of the death penalty. The movie opens with Sister Helen (Susan Sarandon) teaching children in New Orleans. She receives a letter from Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn), who is on death row for rape and murder. Sister Helen goes to meet him and despite reservations from the prison chaplain, she becomes Poncelet's spiritual director.

Sister Helen listens to Poncelet with compassion, but she finds him rude, angry and unrepentant. However, she isn't deterred. She continues to visit him, patiently witnessing God's love and mercy, while challenging him to reflect on his life.

With his execution approaching, Poncelet eventually responds positively to Sister Helen's ministry and care. He confesses to his crimes and accepts personal responsibility for what happened. Sister Helen remains with Poncelet to the end. He expresses his sorrow, seeks forgiveness and dies acknowledging what he did.

In the first reading, the Prophet Ezekiel responds to a well known saying of the time quoted at the beginning of chapter 18: "*the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.*"

Ezekiel refutes the saying by teaching that each person is responsible for their actions and must live with the consequences. In other words, don't blame God for your life or for what happens to your children! "*You say, the way of the Lord is unfair... Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?*"

It is often much easier to deny our responsibility and shift the blame onto others and find excuses. Yes, all of us are influenced by our upbringing, environment and experiences. But there comes a time when we must stop blaming others and accept responsibility for our actions. It is refreshing when someone meaningfully says, 'I did it. I'm responsible. I have to face the consequences'.

Accepting responsibility is an important step in the process of repentance. It moves us to do something about our actions, knowing that God's grace, mercy and strength will accompany us. "*When the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life.*"

The gospel also highlights the need for personal responsibility. One son gives his assurance that he will work in his father's vineyard, and then doesn't. He abdicates his responsibility. The other son initially refuses his father's request, but later sees his error and puts the situation right by going to work in the vineyard. He takes responsibility for his actions.

The examples of the second son and Matthew Poncelet show us that it's never too late to take responsibility for our lives and face up to the consequences of our actions. When we do,

the psalm promises us that God will show us steadfast loving kindness, reach out to us with forgiveness and teach us how to walk in the path of salvation.

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Antiphons for the Mass

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON (or a hymn) All that you have done to us, O Lord, you have done with true judgement, for we have sinned against you and not obeyed your commandments. But give glory to your name and deal with us according to the bounty of your mercy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 24)

Antiphon: Remember your mercies, O Lord.

RESPONSE: Remember your mercies, O Lord.

Lector: Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour. R.

Lector: Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth. In your love remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord. R.

Lector: The Lord is good and upright. He shows the path to those who stray, he guides the humble in the right path; he teaches his way to the poor. R.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION Alleluia, alleluia! My sheep listen to my voice, says the Lord; I know them, and they follow me. Alleluia!

COMMUNION ANTIPHON (1) or (2) (or a hymn)

(1) Remember your word to your servant, O Lord, by which you have given me hope.

This is my comfort when I am brought low.

(2) By this we came to know the love of God: that Christ laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Today's Readings Ezekiel 18:25-28; Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 21:28-32

Next Week (27th Sunday of Year A) Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 79; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-43