

February 23, 2025 – Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

***Connecting the Soul with the Mind* by Pastor Julio Romero**

Gospel: Luke 6:27-38

John Maxwell wrote a great book called *Failing Forward*. The premise of the book is that if we learn from our mistakes, we actually improve in life. He states, "Everybody fails, errs, and makes mistakes. You've heard the saying 'To err is human, to forgive is divine.' Alexander Pope wrote that more than 250 years ago. And he was only paraphrasing a saying that was common 2,000 years ago, during the time of the Romans. Things today are the same as they were then: If you're a human being, you're going to make mistakes."

John Maxwell adds this thought about mistakes: "Errors become mistakes when we perceive them and respond to them incorrectly. Mistakes become failures when we continually respond to them incorrectly." In other words, we should learn from our mistakes and not repeat them!

These may seem like basic teachings or common sense. However, in our Gospel reading this morning, I think Jesus is teaching us more about failures than mistakes. There are things in this Gospel that we don't even recognize as mistakes, and because we don't see them as mistakes, we continue failing.

All of this might sound like a riddle, but here's how it relates to our Gospel. Our common sense and reasoning tell us that it's okay to love only those who love us, to be kind to those who are good to us, and to hate and despise those who aren't. Our common sense and reasoning tell us to do good only to those who are good to us, to give only to those from whom we will receive something back. Our logic tells us to look after ourselves first, before caring for others. Our minds tell us to bless and pray for our friends and family but to curse our enemies and oppressors, to respond to violence with more violence.

I realize that this attitude is not only part of our common sense and reasoning, but also part of our conscience. Since we were children, we have been taught that this is the right way to protect ourselves—to look out for ourselves. However, according to our Lord Jesus, this attitude is not our strength but our weakness. When we keep making the same mistake and view it as part of our strength, we keep failing.

One of the hardest things in our spiritual journey is recognizing our mistakes and weaknesses—not through our reasoning and intellect, but through our soul, heart,

and spirit. Let's face it, even the strongest among us have their weaknesses. There is a story of a British man named Steve Cleary. He was in his early 50s, retired from the Royal Navy, and had started a second career. However, he just couldn't seem to get to work on time—he was always 5, 10, or 15 minutes late. Despite being a good worker and very clever, the owner was unsure how to handle it. Finally, one day, he called Steve into his office.

"Steven, I have to tell you, I like your work ethic, you do a top-class job, but your frequent lateness is becoming a problem."

"Yes, I realize that sir, and I'm working on it," replied Steve.

"I'm glad to hear that. But it's odd that you're always late, considering you retired from the Royal Navy. What would they have said if you were late there?"

"They would have said, 'Good morning, Admiral.'"

Even the strongest, most disciplined people among us have weaknesses. Now, imagine the rest of us.

The teachings of our Lord Jesus in this Gospel expose our spiritual weaknesses. They point out our failures—failures that can only be seen by our souls, hearts, and spirits. Perhaps the saying "To err is human, to forgive is divine" helps us connect the dots to understand better what Jesus is teaching us through this Gospel.

Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to love and do good to those who love us, or to give to those who give to us, or to pray for our family and friends. No, He is not saying that. What He is saying is that when we do these things, we are only halfway to the Kingdom of God.

Remember the phrase "To err is human, to forgive is divine." In it, we recognize that there are human actions, feelings, and emotions that belong only to the realm of God. Forgiveness is one of them. The divine can only be seen, assimilated, and understood through our soul, spirit, and heart—through the parts of us that were created in God's image.

To make sense of what our Lord Jesus is saying, we must listen, see, and act with our soul, spirit, and heart. Imagine how different the world would be if everyone suddenly began giving without expecting anything back, doing good for those who hate them, blessing those who curse and abuse them. Someone once said, "Let's give peace a chance." Jesus says, "Let's give my teachings a chance," especially today, when our hearts may be more open to hate than love.

We have been told all along that loving, caring, blessing, praying, and giving to those who love us is the right way. But today, the words of our Lord Jesus fall upon us like a bucket of cold water, reminding us that our mistakes, our weaknesses, and our failures stem from not going the extra mile and failing to bring the Kingdom of God to the world.

Part of our Lord's mission was to bring the Kingdom of Heaven down to earth. He went the extra mile. He loved His enemies. He prayed for and forgave those who cursed Him and crucified Him. He gave without expecting anything in return.

Mistakes are inevitable in life, but there is a big difference between making a mistake and becoming a failure. To avoid becoming a failure in matters pertaining to God and His Kingdom, we must look at everything we do—not just with our mind and reasoning, but with our soul, heart, and spirit. **Amen.**