

## SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)

February 24, 2019

1 Sm 26:2, 7–9, 12–13, 22–23 • 1 Corinthians 15:45–49 • Luke 6:27–38

### I.

You've probably never heard of him,  
but you should tell your children about him:  
Aristides de Sousa Mendes (1885–1954).

He was Portugal's Oscar Schindler, as in "Schindler's List."

Mendes served as the Portuguese consul-general in Bordeaux, France during World War II.

With the outbreak of the war,  
Portugal was intent on maintaining neutrality.

Antonio Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, gave strict orders that Jews, along with other categories of persons, should not be issued visas to come to Portugal.

After Germany invaded France and Paris fell, crowds of Jews began to gather at the Portuguese consulate in Bordeaux.

Among them was a Polish rabbi, with his family, who pleaded for help, and who told Mendes:

"It's not just me that needs help,  
but all my fellow Jews who are in danger of their lives."

Mendes wallowed in despair for three days, confined to his bed.

Then he sprang into action.

Disobeying orders,  
he began to issue the first of what would be tens of thousands of  
visas to Jews fleeing the holocaust.

He said to them,  
“I cannot allow all you people to die.”

At one point,  
Mendes himself even led a caravan of refugees across the Spanish-  
Portuguese border, invoking his authority as consul.

Mendes was punished for his actions,  
being forced to retire from diplomatic service without a pension.

Destitute, toward the end of his life  
he was fed at a local Jewish soup kitchen.

## II.

Moral courage.

We live in a different era,  
but one in which both the world and the Church  
need us to be courageous in living out our faith.

There are difficulties in society.

And there is a scandal raging in the Church.

We face a different kind of urgency today.

It's more long-term than the situation that Mendes faced so heroically.

To live out Jesus' teaching in the Gospel is moral heroism.

His words form part of the Sermon on the Plain, the Evangelist Luke's version of the more famous Sermon on the Mount:

“Love your enemies,  
do good to those who hate you,  
bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who mistreat you. ...  
Stop judging and you will not be judged.  
Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.  
Forgive and you will be forgiven.”

Jesus intends his words to be a norm for all of his disciples, not an impossible ideal.

Moral courage begins by recognizing that these words are meant to guide our everyday behavior: at home, at the dinner table, at work, at the grocery store.

Listening to Christ's words, we can feel overwhelmed by how difficult they are to fulfill—especially when other people don't make the effort.

Christ addresses that very point:

“If you love those who love you,  
what credit is that to you?  
Even sinners love those who love them.  
And if you do good to those who do good to you,

what credit is that to you?  
Even sinners do the same.”

I think the key to living the Church’s moral teaching is to recognize the source—Jesus Christ—and to stay close to him.

Because we believe that Christ is a person whose power works in our lives, enabling us to fulfill his commands.

Faith is first and foremost a personal encounter with Jesus Christ; moral living flows from that experience.

So, Christianity is not primarily a moral code; it’s a relationship with Jesus in his Church.

Once we have that encounter,  
we strive to live as he commanded us,  
because that is the way that leads to happiness and fulfillment,

Here are some practical ways for us to encounter Christ and then live according to his teaching:

1. Dedicate time each day for prayer.
2. Examine our conscience at the end of each day, considering how we lived well and how we didn’t, and asking God to help us the next day.
3. Receive the Sacrament of Penance regularly.

Go at least once a liturgical season; shoot for once a month.

There is a text from Pope St. Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604 A.D.), who is featured both in sanctuary mural and in the stained-glass windows, that I find helpful in my own life.

Gregory the Great was the first Benedictine pope.

He wrote the following with great honesty about life and work:

“With my mind divided and torn to pieces by so many problems, how can I meditate or preach wholeheartedly? ...In my position I must often communicate with worldly men. At times I let my tongue run, for if I am always severe in my judgments, the worldly will avoid me, and I can never attack them as I would. As a result I often listen patiently to chatter. And because I too am weak, I find myself drawn little by little into idle conversation, and I begin to talk freely about matters which once I would have avoided. What once I found tedious I now enjoy.”

And then Gregory poses a question:

How can I fulfill my duty when I so full of weakness?

The answer:

“Truly the all-powerful Creator and Redeemer of mankind can give me in spite of my weaknesses a higher life and effective speech; because I love him, I do not spare myself in speaking of him.”

The world needs our courage, and the Church needs us to be saints.

Christ has enlightened us with his teaching,  
and he invigorates us with his power.

If we cling to him in love, we will live out his teaching—forever.