

INTRODUCTION:

Our first reading is from the book of Revelation (*Rev. 7, 2-4. 9-14*). The section just preceding today's passage described the end of the world. The sun became dark and the moon became red as blood and there was a great earthquake all over the earth. People tried to hide from all these terrible things and they asked: "Who can survive?" Today's reading answers the question: those who have followed Christ faithfully. And those who have followed Christ faithfully form a large crowd which no one could count. The number 144,000 is a symbolic number, symbolic of completion or perfection.

HOMILY:

(*Gospel: Matthew 5, 1-12a*) Do you ever notice all the saints we have represented here at St. Boniface church? There is the Blessed Virgin altar and St. Joseph's altar with their statues. There are statues of St. Anthony, St. Rita, St. Teresa (aka, the Little Flower), St. Patrick and St. John Vianney (in the back). Someone asked where is the statue of St. Boniface. It's outside at the top of the front of the church. There are those in the stained glass windows: Sts. Martha and Mary, all the apostles, St. Boniface, St. Cecilia and St. Gregory the Great in the stained glass windows in the choir loft. There are thousands of others who are designated as "saints" in the Church. I have a book that lists 7000 "saints" and says a little bit about each one of them. Today's first reading tells us about a crowd so large that no one could count them. Who could count how many people there were who have lived holy lives and gone to heaven throughout these past 2000 years? I would have a hard time counting all the wonderful people I have known as a priest whom I'm sure God has welcomed into his kingdom.

We can learn a lot from all these holy people. Among them were people who died young and those who died old, those who were married, those who were single and those who were religious or priests. There were people from every walk of life, wealthy people and poor people and

people in-between. Even though they had so many differences among them, they had certain things in common. They believed in God's love, they made loving God central in their own lives. Some even went so far as to suffer martyrdom rather than give up their commitment to God. They revered the Mass, the sacraments and the Scriptures. They loved others not just in an emotional sort of way but in a way so as to be of service and help to others. In today's feast, the Church not only wants us to remember all these holy people, but the Church puts them before us as guides on our own way to God. And it gives us the comfort of knowing that our relatives and friends who have gone before us and who have died in God's grace now enjoy the fullness of God's life and God's joy. Some of the saints, as we know, were not holy at all in their younger days, but they came to realize the error of their ways and turned their lives around, knowing God is always ready for us to turn back to him if we will.

God has called us all to a life of holiness. God has called us all to be saints. If we end up being pictured in some stained glass window in a church that might be nice, but what is really important is that we be among that great number in God's heavenly kingdom. St. John tells us in today's second reading (*I Jn 3, 1-3*) that in God's love he has made us his children. We are not only called God's children but that's what we really are. We ask the Lord today to help us realize our dignity and our purpose to be God's children for all eternity with God in heaven.

Sister Joanne Geis - Funeral

Nov. 3, 2005

First of all I wish to offer my sympathy to Sr. Joanne's sisters, friends and relatives. For almost eight years it was my privilege to have Sister Joanne as my principal at St. Boniface School. I didn't have to worry about anything while she was in charge. And those who knew her knew that when she was in charge, she was *in charge*. And whatever she was in charge of would be handled with the utmost thoroughness and efficiency. In a word, she got the job done. Sister John Michael asked me what word comes to mind when I think of Sr. Joanne. The word that

came to mind was dedication: dedication to her God, to her community, her family and to the children in school. She was usually the first one to get to school each morning and the last to leave.

Sometimes when I have funerals, I am challenged in trying to say something about a person that is more positive than they liked to play golf and watch TV. There are others that have an abundance of wonderful things I can say about them. And then there are those who make me feel very unworthy to try to say anything about, because I know that I do not have the ability to even touch the hem of their garment and do justice to all their goodness and accomplishments. I felt humbled when Sr. John Michael asked me to do the homily this evening. Sister Joanne poured out her life in service. Sister could say as we heard St. Paul say in this evening's first reading: "I am already being poured out like a libation; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (II Tim. 4,6) I could talk about Sister Joanne for an hour and still feel that whatever I said was inadequate. One thing that I am struck with is to think of all the lives she has touched and how many people are better people because of her.

Our first reading is one from the Book of Wisdom was written about 100 years before Christ. It was a time when the Jews were suffering for their faith. They couldn't understand why. Here they were doing everything God wanted them to do and they were being persecuted. It certainly was contrary to their usual theology which promised them that if they faithfully obeyed God all would go well for them. The passage tries to give some understanding to the problem of why good people suffer. We still struggle to understand it. Sister Joanne certainly had her share of suffering. Our reading from Wisdom reminds us that it's only with the eyes of faith that we can know that there's more to life than what we can see right now. The fool, who does not believe in God, has only a limited knowledge and their view of death is that life is ended; it's all over. But that's not the way a person of faith sees things: "the souls of the just are in the hand of God and no torment can touch them. They are in peace."

And Jesus words to his apostles at the Last Supper tell us that life is temporary. Our true home is to be with him in heaven. He was about to leave his apostles, but only so he could get a place ready for them, then he would take them to be with him. He is asking a lot of them here. He knew what they would go through when he was arrested, put on trial, tortured and put to death as a criminal. He knew how their faith would be shaken. Yet he tells them: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He tells us the same thing tonight. “Have faith in God and have faith in me.”

Tonight we say good by to a wonderful lady and a good friend, one who was dedicated to her God, to her community, her family and to those she served. Good by’s are sad, yet we know it’s not final and forever. God has better things planned for us.

When we came here this evening, perhaps we saw the beautiful trees. They were telling us that summer is over. But we do not grieve that nature is shutting down for we know it’s only temporary. Spring will return and so will a new life that will never end. Amen.

32nd Ordinary – A Cycle

November 6, 2005

INTRODUCTION: (*Wisdom 6,12-16; Matthew 25, 1-13*) Wisdom and intelligence, to some extent, are connected with one another, but I’ve known intelligent people who were not always wise. Wisdom is more than intelligence. It is the ability to see the great mysteries of life in greater depth. It is gained from experience, and learning, and meditation, and it is practical as we hear Jesus explain it in today’s gospel. When I read the paper about those who are fighting against the teaching that the universe could have come about by “intelligent design,” I wonder if it’s wisdom that they are missing out on. In spite of mysteries we can’t solve, they can’t conceive the possibility that there is some intelligence behind all that exists in our universe. Our first reading tells us wisdom is available for anyone who seeks it with honesty and openness. But those who find the search for wisdom too much trouble will be deprived of it.

HOMILY: A wedding is a big deal for us today, but after months of preparation, it's over in just a few hours. At the time of Jesus it was *really* a big deal. They would celebrate for days. And there was no such thing as saying the wedding will be at such and such a place at 6:30 in the evening. According to custom the groom would go to the bride's house to negotiate with the bride's father and then the groom would bring the bride with him to his home and the celebrating would begin. On their approach to the home of the husband, the couple were to be met by ten virgins carrying lamps. (Street lights weren't invented yet, you know.) Perhaps the groom was doing a little partying on his own before he went to claim his bride from her father, or maybe the groom and the father did a lot of dickering over what possessions the bride would bring with her when she left. At any rate no one worried too much about the time, especially since the celebration would last for a few days. The wise virgins were smart enough to prepare for whatever might happen. The foolish ones used no foresight at all. That's part of wisdom: foresight, thinking ahead, considering what could happen if we take or do not take a certain course of action, being prepared. Jesus applies his lesson to eternal life. We're only in this life for a short time. "Our citizenship is in heaven," St. Paul tells us. We're just tourists here, no matter what country or city we call home. Everything is temporary. Jesus tells us the wise person thinks ahead, they know some day they will have to meet their maker and they are practical. They make sure that they will be prepared when the Lord shows up on their doorstep.

We can't interpret the oil in the story too literally. If we think of it as a material object that could be shared, we're going to think how selfish of those five wise virgins. But it is something symbolic that is intangible, something that cannot be given to someone else. It is something that we have worked for like a loving relationship with God or the good works we have done or the wisdom we have gained through prayer and meditation. The person we have come to be through God's grace can't just be put into a bottle and given to someone else.

When I read about these five wise women, I can't help mentioning two wise women I knew well who have met the bridegroom this past week. The first was Sister Joann, our principal here at St. Boniface for 18 years. As a

dedicated Sister of Charity for 55 years, almost all of that time serving as a teacher or a principal, I can only marvel how many lives she has touched and how many people's lives have been blessed because of her. Her lamp was filled with good works. The other wise woman I am thinking of is my step-mother. When I was 14 years old, the oldest of five, my mother died. My dad had five children to raise. Within a few months, Rosella came into our lives. She and my father were soon married and Rosella took care of us, until we had to start taking care of her. For the past three years the Little Sisters of the Poor took over caring for her and they did a marvelous job. After 52 years as our step-mother, we said good by to her this week as God took her. She was a wise lady, always putting God first. Her day always began with daily Mass when she was able to get to church. At the Little Sisters she was able to get to daily Mass, although at 95 she sometimes slept through it. She always taught us, and her step-grandchildren, to keep God first too. I would visit her every week and whenever I was leaving she would tell me: "If you don't see me next week, I'm on my way to heaven." She was totally at peace with herself, her God and all people she knew. Her lamp was filled with good works.

Our gospel is a little frightening today. It tells us about ten women, five of whom were prudent and wise and five who lost out on a grand time because they were not. The frightening thing was, they almost made it. There's a saying "almost doesn't count, except in horseshoes." Our eternal happiness is too important to leave to "almost." God wants us to be happy. He wants us to spend eternity with him. And for that we must give him our love. And love isn't a matter of almost. A couple in love do not say to one another "I almost love you." Love is total. The only way we'll be totally happy is to totally love the God who is love. Amen.

Rosella Robinson - Funeral

Nov. 12, 2005

In Rosella we have all had a good friend. Offering sympathy is in order, because we've lost a step-mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a friend, a wonderful lady. At the same time we are not here to grieve but to celebrate. We celebrate that Rosella lived a good and full life for 95 years, that she died a peaceful death, that she lived and died filled with God's grace. We also celebrate our faith that she is now enjoying the

rewards of eternal life. As our first reading says: “The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed in the view of the foolish to be dead...but they are in peace.” For the bible, a fool is someone who doesn’t believe in God. Their vision of reality is limited. Their mind is closed to anything they cannot discover for themselves. So death is the end of life in the view of a foolish person, since they have no belief in God. But for one who has faith, there is more to life than just the few years we spend on this earth. There is unending life with God. If a fool is someone who doesn’t believe in God, then by those standards, Rosella was a person with profound and extraordinary wisdom. Her life was centered on God and her prayers were for those she loved that they too would live a life centered on God.

I was talking with George the other evening and he said whenever she called him she would introduce herself as: “This is Rosella, your godmother.” She took her role seriously. George said by reminding him she was his godmother, he thinks she was also reminding him that she had the responsibility and the authority to straighten him out if he needed it. I’m sure all her godchildren got gentle reminders at times and I’m sure they got lots of extra prayers as well.

The gospel I chose for our Mass today was on the Eucharist. The Eucharist was so important to Rosella. She would come to Mass every day when she could. Jesus tells us “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” It is in this faith that I can say we are here to celebrate, knowing Rosella was well nourished with the bread of life, the body and blood of Jesus who promised: “whoever eats this bread will live forever.”

In 1952 our mother, Alice, died. Rosella knew Alice and often Rosella told me that because of the friendship they shared, she felt she should step in and help out after Alice died. And she did when she married my father in February, 1953. For over 52 years she has been with us. She was a caregiver through and through. When she was finished caring for

us, she cared for her sister, Catherine, and she cared for her grandchildren. It was what made her happy, to be needed by someone. And she didn't want to inconvenience anyone. She would always tell me, "Now if you have something planned and something happens to me, don't change your plans. Just go ahead with what you were going to do."

All kinds of great things could be said about Rosella, her kindness, her gentleness, her faith, her dedication to family. One thing I always remarked about was that I seldom heard her say a negative thing about anyone. Dad would often get frustrated with her when he wanted to complain about someone and she would make excuses for them or stand up for them.

I have no worries about where she is now. I'm sure she can say with St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on a merited crown awaits me..." I believe she now must have a double crown, the first for living with my father (I loved my father, but those who knew him will understand what I mean). The second crown would be for taking over the care of five children, four in grade school and me in high school.

Since she's been at the Little Sisters, who took wonderful care of her, I would try to visit her every week. Whenever I was about to leave she would say "If I don't see you next week, I'll be on my way to heaven." She was peaceful with her God, with herself and with those who knew her. She was ready to go. So I can't grieve. I can only say thank you God for giving us a good woman to take care of us when we needed her, a good woman to inspire us in the way of holiness and a good woman to pray for us and whom I am sure will continue to pray for us until we're all together.

When she died a week ago we were enjoying the beautiful colors of fall. The red and yellow and gold trees were telling us that summer is over. But we do not grieve that the green leaves are gone and that nature is

shutting down for we know it's only temporary. Spring will return and so will a new life for Rosella and for all of us, a life that will never end. Amen.

33rd Ordinary – A Cycle

November 13, 2005

(Matthew 25, 14-30) Our story today is about talents. The talents our gospel is talking about are not necessarily talents like being able to paint or sing or play sports or write poetry. The gospel could apply to those kind of talents, but the talent in the parable referred to money and it was a specific amount of silver or gold. Just to give you a feel for the story, it wasn't just a few coins the master handed out to his servants. A talent of silver would have been about two to three thousand pounds of silver. The guy who buried his talent would have had to dig a pretty big hole to bury it and the others may have needed a Brink's truck to hold what they had been given.

The one man said he was too afraid of his boss to risk investing it. The thought struck me that maybe the other two had just as much fear of their master and that's what motivated them to do something with the talents they had been given. Fear is not always bad. Sometimes it motivates us to action rather than immobilize us. That idea might be interesting to talk about sometime, but not today.

What I want to tell you is what you already know. If we work hard, we will be more likely to succeed at what we are doing. Good luck as well as bad luck can affect the results of our hard work, but for the most part we get out of life what we put into it. That's a no-brainer.

Jesus is telling us that our eternal happiness operates according to the same principle. We will get out of our spiritual life what we put into it. Too many people today have selective hearing when it comes to the gospel. They enjoy hearing all about God's mercy and love, but they tend to ignore the places where Jesus tells us about our responsibilities. Today's parable tells us heaven is not a freebie and it's not automatic. If it were, why did Jesus stress the importance of prayer and doing good works or why did Christ come to us in the first place to teach us anything? Grace is indeed a gift. But we have to make good use of it. Over and over Jesus tells us God is all goodness and caring and giving and love, but if we don't use the graces and gifts and love he offers us we will lose them. He can't save us without our cooperation. If his parable doesn't tell us that, it doesn't tell us anything.

At times we've all experienced disappointments with the way our investments of time or resources or talents have paid off. A business we invested in may have gone bankrupt. Someone we tried to help may let us down or even turned against us. We can get discouraged and be afraid to risk disappointment again. It's not the thing to do, but many have buried their time, talent or treasure and have turned inward for just that reason. But even though the world can disappoint us, God will not.

Our Lord will reward us when we serve him faithfully, but he will do so in his own way and in his own time. And that's where faith comes in, to trust that he will. When we expect that we should always get paid off every time we pray or do something good, we're not trusting him. The great wealth the master handed over to the servants when he went on his trip was

considered trivial in the parable compared to the greater things the master rewarded the faithful servants with.

Our Mass gives us help to use God's gifts wisely. It reminds us of how we have been blessed, it reminds us of our responsibilities, it encourages us to remain faithful. And it not only encourages us, but the Mass is the greatest prayer we have, so as a prayer it helps us to use well the gifts God has given us, especially the gift of his grace. Amen.

Christ the King – A Cycle Nov. 20, 2005

INTRODUCTION: (*Ezekiel 34, 11-12. 15-17; I Cor. 15, 20-26.28; Matthew 25, 31-46*) There was an artist who wanted to create a statue of Christ the King. He started working on a clay model, picturing Christ with his arms upraised, his head back and a joyful expression on his face. It was a triumphant Christ, much like the picture of Christ St. Paul gives us in today's second reading. But when the artist went to bed it started to rain and the moist air blowing in the window made the clay in his statue begin to sag. When the artist saw his work in the morning, Christ's arms were down, his head was bowed, his shoulders drooped and the expression on his face looked sad. Our readings give us both images of Christ the king today. In the first reading he is the powerful Christ, acting as shepherd of his people caring for them. In the gospel he is our judge. But also in the gospel he identifies himself with the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and imprisoned and he tells us "just as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it for me."

HOMILY: The lesson Jesus teaches us in today's gospel has really been understood and accepted by most Christians. There was an article on the front page of the Catholic Telegraph in which Catholics were asked what teachings of the Church were personally "very important" to them. At the very top of the list 84 % listed helping the poor as "very important." The picture Jesus paints of the last judgment has deeply impacted most people when it comes to caring for others.

But I always wondered where worship of God fit in here. Isn't that something that's important too? Why didn't Jesus mention that when he talked about the last judgment? Should we forget about prayer and worship and Mass and spend more time doing good for others? That question always puzzled me until I realized that Jesus was preaching to people who took their religious responsibilities seriously. In Jesus' day a good Jew wouldn't think of missing synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus himself went to the synagogue each week, St. Luke tells us. Furthermore, St. Matthew was not writing his gospel for unbelievers but the Church, for a community of believers who gathered together each Sunday, the Lord's Day, to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of the Lord Jesus and in union with him. Neither Jesus, nor Matthew in talking about how God will judge us had to stress the importance of keeping holy the Lord's day, because their audience was already doing that. Instead, they had to stress to **church going** people that **just** going to church is not enough to be a good Christian. Remember there were **two** commandments Jesus gave us when he was asked what is the greatest commandment. In the early Church most people were aware of the first one (love God) and knew we owed God our worship and praise and thanksgiving, but they needed to be reminded of the second one (love your neighbor). Today that seems to have flip-flopped. The same article in the Catholic Telegraph reported that many Catholics think they can be **good** Catholics without going to Mass every Sunday. The percentage of those who think Mass every Sunday is important ranges from a high of 60 % for those over 65 to just 15% for those in the 18-25 age bracket. After I read this report in the Catholic Telegraph I was struck by an interesting passage from the Book of Revelation. The passage described God's people in heaven who were victorious over the forces of evil and they were singing a hymn to God. The words of their hymn were: "Who would dare refuse you honor, or the glory due your name, O Lord? Since you alone are holy, all nations shall come and worship in your presence." Worship is what too many people are missing in their spiritual lives. Worship is part of being a "good" Catholic. And for a good Catholic that worship is the Mass. Somewhere along the line, the third commandment has been forgotten.

If Christ is our king do we not owe him honor and praise and thanksgiving? We'll all get together with family and friends this Thursday and stuff

ourselves and call that thanksgiving. And some will feel we've done a duty to God. If we're satisfied with that, the Bible tells us: God's not.

We live in a democracy. It's far from perfect, but when I travel to other countries or read about the politics in other countries, I'm grateful to be here in the United States of America. Over two hundred years ago, our ancestors fought hard to be rid of having a king to rule over us. We want to make up our own rules. Our feast today reminds us there are limits to our ability to make our own rules and determine our own destiny. There are certain values that are absolute, that society cannot do away with. There is a layer of power above us that is higher than the president and the governors and the legislators. That power is God who has the authority to tell us how to live and the things we must or must not do. When we honor Christ as our king, we're not saying he's a president we can vote out if we do not like what he tells us. When we honor him as our king we commit ourselves to faithfully following him, the only path that will lead to sharing in his glory and in his kingdom some day. Amen.

1st Sunday of Advent November 27, 2005

INTRODUCTION: (*Isaiah 63, 16b-17. 19b; 64, 2-7*) Today's first reading is a desperate prayer for God to come to save his people. It is one of the most sublime prayers we find in Scripture. God's people were suffering and they knew it was because of their pride and rebellion against their God. They ask for his help and forgiveness. It's a good prayer for us as we begin Advent. We ask God to open our hearts to his coming.

HOMILY: (*Mark 13, 33-37*) You may have seen the sign "Jesus is coming. Look busy!" As we've heard so many times, the word "advent" means "coming" and the season of advent is a time to prepare for Christ's coming. Jesus tells us emphatically to be alert for that coming. Too often we get overly involved in preparing to celebrate his coming in the past. Of course we are joyful that God has come to us as a little baby 2000 years ago, and it is appropriate that we prepare to celebrate such an awesome event. But that's not all there is to advent and it's not that coming that Jesus is referring to in today's gospel when he tells us to be watchful and to be alert.

Advent is as much about the future as it is about the past. If we do not prepare for his future coming, his coming in the past will be of little value to us. The time for that future coming is unknown to any of us. There will be a time when he comes to each of us personally at the end of our life. None of us are going to be here forever. There will be a time when he comes at the end of the world. If we're prepared for his coming at the end of our lives, we'll be prepared for his other coming in glory at the end of time. Since we do not know when either of those future

comings will be, we are inclined to busy ourselves with more pressing things, with more immediate wants and needs.

A few years ago I attended a time management workshop. One of the most useful insights I got out of the workshop is to make a distinction between what is urgent and what is important. They're not always the same thing. For example, a friend calls this afternoon and invites us to a lecture on the sex life of the mosquito. It's urgent. It has to be done right now if we're going to do it. It may not be very important to us unless we're a biologist. Making a will is something important, but it may not be urgent (unless we're on our deathbed). What is important will eventually become urgent, but what is urgent is not always important. I stress this because there are so many things that we feel are urgent at this time of the year. Buy this, send this card, get ready for this event... Some of the urgent things we feel at this time might be important, but we have to be careful not to let them override the most important thing of all: preparing for Christ's coming - an event that we often do not feel so urgent about!

With all the stuff that happens at this time of the year and the stuff we feel we must have, we cannot forget that the child whose birth we celebrate was born in poverty, lived in poverty, died in poverty and taught us not to make "things" too important in our lives. I'm not encouraging poverty, but sometimes we have to work hard not to equate Christmas with a lot of stuff.

Don't think I'm too much of a Scrooge! I enjoy the lights and the music of Christmas. We even have a special Christmas music program here on the 9th of December. I enjoy poinsettias and wreaths and giving and receiving gifts and I enjoy parties. But it's my responsibility to remind myself, and you as well, that this time of the year is first of all meant to enrich us spiritually. If all it does is wear us out and empty our wallets, we've missed the point. Be awake and aware. We are to prepare our hearts to become more the kind of person we know Christ wants us to be. We have Mass every morning, we have two holy hours during the week. After Mass each morning we have either morning prayer in the rectory or rosary in church. We will have a communal penance service in about a week. Even if you can get to church for some extra prayers, I would recommend taking quiet time each day. Quiet time helps us keep things in perspective and it is more important now than at any other time during the year. Our Catholic Update inserted in today's bulletin lists the Scripture readings for each day and a brief reflection. You might also consider putting someone on your gift list who cannot do anything for you in return.

Our Advent wreath reminds us not only how fast the weeks are going before Christmas, but it also reminds us how fast time goes in general. And it reminds us that with each passing week, Christ's light should shine more brightly in our lives. In other centuries Advent had a penitential character and was marked by long fasts. We see remnants of this penitential aspect in the violet vestments and no flowers at the altar and the elimination of the Gloria. It gives a hint that a little self-denial might help us celebrate Christmas with greater joy.

We might ask ourselves as we begin a new Church year, are we any better prepared to meet him today than we were a year ago? If we have backtracked or just stayed in the same place spiritually, we need to hear Jesus once again tells us "stay awake, be alert."

