

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 8, 2009

INTRODUCTION: [I Kings 17,10-16; Hebrews 9,24-28; Mark 12,38-44]

I want to begin by saying something about the second reading. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews was interested in showing the superiority of Jesus' sacrifice to those of the Old Testament. He is referring especially to the once a year sacrifice on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) as was celebrated just six weeks ago on Sept 27. In the time before 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the Temple, the High Priest alone would enter the Holy Place. Year after year he would offer sacrifice for the sins of God's people. The Letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that Christ's sacrifice for sins took place only once and didn't need to be offered again and again because his sacrifice was perfect. We participate in this perfect sacrifice of Christ each time we come to Mass.

Our first reading will make more sense if we know that the events that are described in the reading happened during a severe famine. We have to marvel at the faith of this widow.

HOMILY: Two weeks ago I asked our parishioners to raise their contributions by 10% or by however much they could afford. Last Sunday's collection was very impressive – it was over \$10,000. I know there were a couple of unusually large checks that accounted for that amount. I see this as a sign that most parishioners heard my message and are responding. That's good and I thank you very much. I know not all of our parishioners were here two weeks ago when I gave my money talk, so this week I sent out my homily to everyone I could who comes here because I'm asking for everyone's help. So if you have received that homily, don't think I'm badgering you. I'm just trying to communicate with all the people who help support us. I'll dispense you from reading the homily if you heard it the first time two weeks ago.

It's just a coincidence that our gospel is about money today. The most obvious part of the gospel is the contrast between the people who made big donations (which would have made a noticeable amount of noise with all the large coins clinking in the donation boxes) and the tiny donation from the poor widow. A few years ago someone gave me a widow's mite. I was going to show it to you but you wouldn't have been able to see it from the pews. I don't think it's even half the size of a penny. Whenever I read this story in the past, I always assumed that Jesus was condemning those who were showy about their generosity and he was praising the poor widow and expecting us to follow her example. Maybe praise of this woman is implicit in his remark, but notice Jesus didn't really expand on what he observed. He could have been thinking this woman was generous in the extreme and she would be greatly blessed like the woman in our first reading who gave her last morsel of food to the prophet. He could have been thinking maybe she should have been more practical and should have saved her two copper coins for something to eat. He could have been referring to his remark about the scribes who devoured the savings of widows. Or he could have been thinking of his own sacrifice (giving his life in love for us) that was soon to take place. He didn't say what he was thinking. Let us be clear about this: he wasn't condemning giving large amounts to charity. He was practical and knew bills had

to be paid. After all, St. Paul tells us God loves a cheerful giver. We don't even know if this poor woman was cheerful or not cheerful. We only know she gave more than all the rest if you consider she gave all she had. I would like to speculate there were people who gave large sums of money who were not necessarily looking for human praise or respect. They were simply trying to give honor and glory to God and to the worship of God. Certainly Jesus would have approved their generosity. I would speculate further that there were people who could afford to give a lot more than they did, but they gave very little. Without much commentary from Jesus, I don't know if today's gospel tells us much about money. But it does tell us about something else: our judgment about things is not always the way God sees things. Our gospel tells us we can observe what a person does but only God can see into our hearts. "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts," says the Lord. (Isaiah 55,9) Who could have known this woman gave away everything she had just by watching her. Who would have known she didn't have a pot of gold hidden under her bed? Only Jesus could have known. Only Jesus knows what's in our hearts, Sometimes we don't even know ourselves what's in our hearts. How many times have we asked ourselves: "why did I do that?" "Why did I say such and such to that person?" "Why do I feel the way that I do?" We can only judge what people do. If they are hurting us or someone else, or if they're being dishonest, for example, we can condemn their actions. Some people have the responsibility to do so - like parents or judges or police personnel, etc. We may even try to guess a person's motivation, but only God can and does see into our hearts. My mother used to always tell me, "even if I don't see you, God sees you." I think if more people were conscious of this, we would have a kinder world. That's one message I do get from today's gospel.

Now that I'm on the topic of money, I want to say something about gambling. This is so elementary I hesitate to say it, but I'm saying it anyway. Gambling is big business and the ones who make the big money from it, after much perseverance, got Ohioans to approve gambling in our state. The Church does not condemn gambling itself, but it can be done irresponsibly. If you decide to gamble, don't gamble more than you can afford to lose, because eventually you will. That's how the people who own the casinos get rich. Think of gambling as a form of entertainment, but if you're gambling more than you can afford to lose, then it's become an addiction. If you're spending money at the casinos, don't forget to set some aside for charity. If you neglect charity so you can splurge more on being entertained, that's not right either. Those are my words about gambling now that it will be in our backyard. God knows what's in our hearts all the time, even the way we spend our money. It tells a lot about our priorities. By the way, giving to charity is like gambling. We are betting on God's generosity and that he will bless us. That's a sure bet. The only part of that gamble we don't know is when it will pay off. Amen.

Feast of Christ the King

Nov. 22, 2009

INTRODUCTION Again this week we hear from the book of Daniel, a book that was written during a time when the Jews were suffering a terrible persecution for their faith. Today's reading

describes how God would triumph in the end. God would establish a kingdom that would be everlasting. God is here described as “the Ancient One.” His kingdom would be ruled by one who is described as “like a son of man.” God would give this “son of man” dominion, glory and kingship. The term “son of man” simply means a human being, but today’s passage invests the term with new depth and mystery. You might recall, “son of man” was the favorite term Jesus used to describe himself.

HOMILY There was a priest who was giving his homily using many gestures. With one grand gesture, he accidentally swept his homily notes off the podium and onto the floor. After he picked them up and tried to reassemble them, the congregation heard him say to himself: “Now, where was I?” One member of the congregation answered back: “Right near the end!”

That has no connection with my homily today, except I hope it never happens to me, but I thought it was funny. Today we celebrate Christ as our King. He’s not like any other king we have heard about as we studied history. His kingdom does not belong to this world. He does not force us to serve him; he only asks us to love him. He does not parade in gold and royal robes; he doesn’t need to. All creation belongs to him – except for those human hearts who choose not to surrender their love – and it will be to their loss unless they do. All other kings must eventually lay aside their power and return to their creator for their power is temporary, but Jesus’ kingdom is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed. But as a king, we are reminded that we owe Jesus our homage, our obedience, and our thanks. It is on this theme of thanks that I wish to continue my homily.

Even our nation gives thanks this week. Those who have faith and who honor Christ as king know that giving thanks needs to be offered more than once a year. Actually giving thanks is central to our faith, as St. Paul wrote to the Galatians (3,15): “dedicate yourselves to thankfulness...sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to God the Father through him.” It is our faith tradition that as a minimum, based on the Commandments, we give thanks at least once a week – on the Lord’s day.

We all get lots of things in our emails I’m sure. This past week I received an email about a man who dreamed he died and went to heaven. When he arrived, St. Peter gave the man’s guardian angel the assignment to show this newcomer around. So the angel took him into a very large building three stories high. They walked in the front door and there on the first floor were hundreds of angels working feverishly, flitting around with papers and note pads and cell phones, writing down messages and phone calls, etc. His angel explained this is the Receiving Section where prayers and requests are processed from all over the world. Then his angel took him up to the second floor where there were hundreds of angels busy filling large envelopes and boxes and sending them off. This, the angel explained, is the Packaging and Delivery Section where favors and blessings and answers to prayers were sent out. Finally they came to the third floor, which was mostly empty except for one angel who was sitting idly at a table reading a magazine, waiting patiently for a phone call or a message from somewhere. This was the Acknowledgement Section where people reply to favors received. The man asked his angel how

does a person acknowledge a favor or a blessing and the angel answered, "It's simple. They just say 'Thank you, Lord.'"

In the Friday's Enquirer on page 13 there was an article reporting that UNICEF claims that one billion children in today's world are deprived of food, shelter, clean water or health care and hundreds of millions more are threatened by violence. Nearly 200 million youngsters are chronically malnourished, more than 140 million are forced to work, and millions of girls and boys of all ages are subjected to sexual violence. More than 24,000 children under the age of five die every day from preventable causes like pneumonia, malaria, measles and malnutrition. Grim statistics we don't like to hear (that's probably why the article was buried on page 13). I don't like to think about them either and I'm not trying to make anyone feel guilty because they happened to have been born in this country rather than in a third world country. I'm just trying to encourage people to stop and think this week that if we have food in the refrigerator, clothes to wear, a roof overhead and a place to sleep; if we woke up this morning with more health than illness; if we have never experienced the fear of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation; if we have a place to worship without the fear of harassment, arrest or torture; if we know how to read; we are more blessed than millions and billions of people in the world today. If we are so blessed, we must say "Thank you Lord" over and over, but we must also, however we can and when the opportunity arises, share some of our blessings with those not so blessed, even if all we can do is sincerely pray for them. May you find a way to truly give thanks this Thursday and may this holiday be also a holy day to reinforce in you the importance of a grateful heart. Amen.