

## 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

October 2/3, 2010

**INTRODUCTION:** (Habakkuk 1,2-3. 2,2-4; Lk 17,5-10) Six hundred years before Christ, the Babylonians were the dominant power in the Middle East with their capital very near modern day Baghdad. The prophet Habakkuk, who speaks to us in today's first reading, lived during the very difficult period that began with the Babylonian army's first assault against the Holy Land in 604 BC, its capture of Jerusalem and its enslavement and exportation of many of the people to Babylon in 597 BC, and the eventual total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple ten years after that. Habakkuk asks God for relief. God assures him it will come if the people just put their trust in God. God even gave detailed instructions to the king through the prophet Jeremiah on how they could avoid disaster, but the king did just the opposite. As a consequence they suffered greatly under the Babylonians.

**HOMILY:** Sister Barbara was sitting by the window of her second floor convent apartment one evening, opening her mail. She received a letter from home and with it there was a \$100 bill. Just as she finished reading the letter she glanced out the window and saw a shabbily dressed man down by the street leaning on the lamppost. He looked like he needed money more than she did, so she wrote on a piece of paper "Don't despair. Sister Barbara," wrapped the \$100 bill in the note and, getting his attention, she threw it down to him. He picked it up, read it and hurriedly walked away. The next day Sister Barbara was told there was a man at the door wanting to see her. When she went to the door there was the same man waiting for her. Without a word he handed her a wad of \$100 bills. "What's this," she asked. "That's the \$8,000 you have coming Sister," he replied. "Don't Despair came in first and paid 80 to 1." (from Laughter, the Best Medicine, Reader's Digest, pg 294)

Don't despair seems to fit today's theme. You can certainly hear despair in today's first reading as Habakkuk prays: "How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!" He is having quite a struggle with God. He goes on for several more verses telling God about all the things that are happening to the Jewish people. Not only were the Babylonians defeating every nation from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea, but God's own people in Judea and Jerusalem had turned from their worship of God to idolatry, child sacrifice and disregard for the poor and disadvantaged. Habakkuk exclaims: "I cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not intervene." "Why, Lord? Why?"

God's answer (as always) is "trust, have faith, be patient." God's salvation will come when God thinks it's the right time. God will not disappoint. Writing it down especially on tablets of stone or clay, would symbolize permanence. Those struggling with faith need this reassurance for "The just one, because of his faith, shall live." St. Paul quotes this line twice in his letters and it applies to faith in Christ. (Rom 1,17 and Gal 3,11). Despair won't help anyone, only faith.

It took many years until, "in the fullness of time" (Galatians 4,4), God himself appeared as the savior, not just for the Jewish people but for all people. He began his saving work when he

came to live among us, but he has not finished it. So we continue to need faith until God's kingdom of eternal peace has been fully established. The apostles did have a sense that what Jesus was asking of them would require a lot of faith. In today's gospel we hear them asking Jesus to increase their faith.

It's interesting the way Jesus responds. It's like he's telling them "Duh! What do you think I've been trying to do ever since you've known me?" (To help you increase your faith). He tells them, "even with a tiny spec of faith you could do unbelievable things." It sounds as if our Lord is saying that if they were to be tested on their faith they would probably get an F minus. What are they to do? What can we do to help our faith along?

The little lesson at the end of the gospel where we are told to do what we are expected to do is a little lesson in humility and also a little lesson in faith insofar as the only way we can increase our faith is to live it (taking time to pray, read the Scriptures and, as we are doing now, by coming to Mass). If we don't live it, it will be like muscles we don't use and will atrophy. I see it happen to people so many times. Another thing we can do is what we hear in today's second reading: "Take as your norm (your practice) the sound words that you heard from me.." (2 Timothy, 1,13) Words are so important, especially the things we tell ourselves. A whole area of counseling has developed around this idea of how what we tell ourselves affects our mood. It's called cognitive therapy. What we tell ourselves also affects our faith. If we always tell ourselves negative things such as "God doesn't love me, he's too busy for me; I'm such a sinner, God can't forgive me; God doesn't hear my prayers; God isn't here when I come to Church," we are going to believe those things. We should tell ourselves what we hear from the Scriptures: "God does love me; Christ died for me; Christ hears me when I pray, even when he says 'no;' Christ truly comes to me in the Eucharist, etc." Telling ourselves those things, especially when we don't feel it, or when the devil whispers doubts in our ears, helps strengthen our faith. Jesus tells us with faith as small as a mustard seed we can do amazing things. Amen.

## **28th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle**

**October 10, 2010**

**INTRODUCTION** - (2 Kings 5, 14-17; 2 Timothy 2, 8-13; Luke 17, 11-19) Israel and Syria (which is north of Israel and Jordan) have been fighting with each other for centuries. Today's first reading takes us back to 850 BC. They were at war then. At that time Syria was called Aram. Our reading is about an Aramean army general named Naaman. He had the dreaded disease of leprosy. His wife had an Israelite girl who was her slave. This slave was most probably captured in battle. She told her master, Naaman, about a prophet in Israel who would be able to cure his disease. That prophet was Elisha. It must have taken a lot of humility and faith for this proud Aramean general to go into enemy territory (Israel) to look for Elisha. When he located him, Elisha wouldn't even give Naaman the courtesy of coming out of his cave or hut to meet with him. He just told him through a messenger to go and bathe in the Jordan River seven times.

This, too, was offensive as Naaman considered the rivers in his own country far superior to the Jordan. Naaman was insulted and decided to go back home, but his friends persuaded him to do as the prophet said. Thus our first reading begins. The reading prepares us for the gospel when we hear about Jesus healing 10 people who had leprosy.

**HOMILY:** A nurse who worked for an orthopedic surgeon tells this story. The doctor was moving to a new office across town and she and the receptionist were helping him move all his equipment. Among the items she was transporting was the skeleton the doctor used when he wanted to point out a problem area to a patient. She put the skeleton in the front seat of her car, with its bony arm stretched across the back of the drivers seat. She hadn't thought how this might look to other drivers on the road. As she waited at a red light, the people in the car next to her really stared her down and she explained, "I'm delivering him to my doctor's office." The other driver leaned out his window and shouted: "I hate to tell you this lady, but I think its too late." (from Laughter, the Best Medicine, Reader's Digest, pg 203) It's nowhere recorded in the Scriptures that Jesus raised a skeleton back to life, but he did raise three others who died back to life: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Naim, and his friend Lazarus in Bethany. In a figurative way he restored life to the ten lepers whom he met on his way to Jerusalem.

Leprosy in that culture included any number of skin diseases, some of which may have been fatal, some of which may have just been a nuisance, but without proper diagnosis and medication, everyone who was thought to have leprosy was ostracized. They could no longer live among their family and friends, but had to live apart lest they infect others. They could not come to synagogue or Temple, they could not work but had to beg, they had to warn anyone coming near to them to stay away. When Jesus sent them off to the priests, he showed his intention to heal them. They wouldn't be seeing the priests for any other reason other than that the priests would declare that they were healthy. They could live a normal life again. As Son of God, whatever Jesus said, took place. Whether it was healing the sick or calming a storm. This is simply why we believe that when he said, "This is my body, this is my blood," the bread and wine truly become his body and blood. Jesus continues his healing power through the Church. He gave us a sacrament to help us in our sickness, one of the seven sacraments. Of course, we can pray on our own for good health, and we should, but the sacraments give additional power to our prayers. The sacrament used to be called Extreme Unction because in the Middle Ages, people forgot why it was originally given to us. Vatican II restored the sacrament to its original purpose and it is now called the Anointing of the Sick. It infallibly gives us grace and help in our illness and sometimes even brings physical healing. I have seen it happen. I administer this sacrament to everyone I visit in the hospital. I always carry the holy oil with me on Sundays because many times people ask me to anoint them after Mass. I like to administer it occasionally throughout the year to everyone who wishes to receive it, and I haven't done that for a while, so I'll do it today after Mass. When we ask in faith, great things can happen, although we may have to keep on asking for a while. This is one of the ways Jesus taught us to pray - to keep on asking. I don't think we see the miracles that could occur because too often people quit praying when they don't get immediate results.

There is another very important lesson in today's gospel that I have to comment on before I end

my homily: gratitude. Only one man returned to Jesus to thank him and to give glory to God. Our society is becoming more and more like this scene, when fewer and fewer come to the Eucharist (which means Thanksgiving) every week to give thanks to God. Certainly we can give thanks in our daily prayers, but there is no more perfect a way to acknowledge God's goodness to us and to thank him than the Eucharist. It is the most perfect prayer for it is a prayer through which our prayers are joined with Christ's perfect sacrifice of love. It is the prayer Jesus gave us at the Last Supper and which he asked us to pray when he said, "Do this in memory of me." So we now thank God for his goodness to us and ask him to bless us in whatever ways we need his help.

## **29th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle**

**October 17, 2010**

**INTRODUCTION** - (Exodus 17, 8-13; 2 Timothy 3,14 - 4,2; Luke 18, 1-8) As Moses led God's people from slavery in Egypt, through the desert, to the Promised Land, they encountered numerous threats to their lives: the army of Pharaoh, the Reed Sea they had to cross, the lack of water and food in the desert. One such threat was opposition from those peoples whose lands they had to pass through to get where they were going. Today's reading speaks of an attack by Amalek, a desert tribe living south of the Dead Sea. Moses positioned himself on a nearby hill to pray for success in battle. He prayed with his arms held high in petition. As long as he prayed, his prayer was powerful and effective. This story is an encouragement to us to persevere in our prayer, which is also the lesson in today's gospel.

**HOMILY** - (1) Two women were out to lunch and began to discuss their marriage. One of the two ladies said, "we just celebrated our 50th anniversary." "That's a long time," the other said. The 50 year anniversary lady agreed, "a long, long time." Then she smiled. "You know what just occurred to me the other day?" she asked. "If I had killed him the first time I felt like it, I would be out of jail by now." (2) A wife and her husband were comparing which of them were the more intelligent. She said to him "I have a higher IQ, did better on my SATs and make more money than you," she pointed out. "Yeah, but when you step back and look at the big picture, I'm still ahead of you," he said. Surprised she asked, "How do you figure?" "I married better," he said with a smile. (Even if he wasn't as smart as she was, he was smart enough to know what to say!) (from Laughter, the Best Medicine, Reader's Digest, pg 163 & 175)

[at 4:00 Mass: I've been friends with the Woliver family for 35 years. I witnessed John's first marriage and buried his wife when she died and I had his second marriage to Theresa a year ago. I'm glad to be able to celebrate this occasion with them. At 10:00 Mass: I've been friends with Ralph and Jeanne for almost 40 years, and in the 40 years I've known them, I've known them to be very loving and dedicated spouses and parents. Their deep faith in each other and in God has always been an inspiration to me. I'm glad to be able to celebrate this occasion with them.]

As I read today's gospel about the widow, an idea related to our own day and age came to me. Widows in ancient times had very little social standing. They were, for the most part, dependent on their father or their eldest son for survival. Without a man to defend them, they easily became the victim of any kind of oppression. At least the woman in today's gospel had a voice with which she could defend herself. I am reminded of the 52 million unborn children killed in our country over the past 37 years since Roe v. Wade. They were entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Their DNA was the same as ours, but they only had our voice.

Now to the main point that our Lord teaches us about prayer. Our parable today is easy enough for anyone to understand. Often, though, we fail to understand why we must keep praying. We can easily understand how one person might eventually persuade another to give in to a request by their persistence; but why is it we need to keep asking God for something? Some people really believe God is too busy and so we need to get his attention, but he tells us God knows even how many hairs are on the top of our head, so we hardly need to get his attention. Some people think we need to inform him of what it is we need or want, but Jesus tells us God knows what we need even before we ask him. Some think they can wear God down like a child who continues to beg his mother for a candy bar he just has to have until she eventually gives in; some think perhaps God forgets, he is old you know; while some think they can get him to change his mind, as if he first thought something was a bad idea, but because he's tired of hearing from us he decides to give in to us. None of these ideas explain why we need to keep "bothering" him. Perhaps it is the opposite that is true, that he wants to hear from us more often. Perhaps it's we who are changed by prayer and not God. Perhaps we are the ones who forget he is our Father and by constantly going to him with our needs we grow in our faith in his love and wisdom. That may have something to do with Jesus' question at the end of the gospel: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" There are all kinds of possible reasons why Jesus tells us not to give up when we pray, but for whatever reason we might conceive or might not we able to conceive, the bottom line is he tells us to not stop asking. All that's just been said is about only one form of prayer: the prayer of petition or supplication. Certainly we can't give up praying other forms of prayer too: prayers of adoration, love, thanksgiving and even contrition.

I would like to take a moment to speak of these other forms of prayer and not just the "asking for things" type of prayer. If we want to grow in our relationship with God, if we want to grow in knowing God, loving God, experiencing the peace and joy that only God can give, then we can't stop praying. In everyone's spiritual journey, there are desert periods, periods when we wonder if God is listening, periods when prayer gives us no consolation. All the saints have gone through periods like this and all of them say we have to keep on praying. To continue to pray during those dry times is to continue to grow deeper in faith, even in ways we are not aware of. Consistency in prayer, praying when we feel like it and when we don't is most important for our spiritual growth. This is one reason, among many, why we are supposed to come to Mass every Sunday, so we keep growing closer to God. That's what the Lord wants, and that's the mission of the Church to keep us growing in this way.

## 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

October 24, 2010

**HOMILY:** (Sirach 35,12-14.16-18; 2 Timothy 4,6-8.16-18; Luke 18,9-14)

Today is Mission Sunday, a Sunday in October when there is a collection taken up all over the world for the missions. This collection helps support almost 200,000 schools, almost 18,000 health clinics and leprosy centers and over 1,000 dioceses. It's a very important collection for the worldwide Church. I will give you one hint of what they deal with. I have an Italian friend (my age), named Tony, who is helping to build a school for girls in Ethiopia. I had the opportunity to visit with him for a few hours recently when I was in Rome. One story impressed me. He told me when he went to Ethiopia many years ago, only about 10 % of the people wore shoes. Now it's up above 50 %. We suffer under bad times economically, but sometimes we forget how many people in the rest of the world are suffering to a much greater degree. There are special envelopes for the mission collection, but because this is a major collection, even if you put loose cash in the basket, it will go to the missions today.

This joke has been around for a long time. A young priest became the associate at a large suburban parish and after several months the pastor sat down with him to review his performance. The pastor said the young priest had been a true blessing for the parish, attendance was up, collections were up, the youth group was more active and a lot more people were coming to confession. The pastor complimented him even for the very creative way he designed a drive-through confessional. But the pastor said the assistant would have to get rid of the big sign in the front of the church that said, "Toot and tell or go to hell!" I've never heard of an actual drive-through confessional, but I don't think God would object. God is always ready to offer his grace to those who ask for his mercy and forgiveness.

We have two people in today's gospel who have come to the Temple to pray. The one thinks he will avoid hell because he's such a wonderful person; the other throws himself on God's mercy. The story would have shocked Jesus' listeners, because the Pharisees had such a reputation for holiness. They were a lay movement that had dedicated themselves to keeping God's law perfectly. Along with the 613 commandments of the Law, the Pharisees tithed, which was one of God's laws. As an additional practice, they fasted often. This particular one fasted twice a week, which was no small sacrifice. A tax collector, on the other hand, was included in the list of occupations considered "crafts of robbers," which no father encouraged his son to practice. Tax collectors were especially singled out, for the opportunity to cheat others was always there. Plus tax collectors usually were collecting taxes for the Romans - the Jews hated oppressors.

So, naturally Jesus' audience would have expected God to bless the Pharisee and pretty much ignore the tax collector. This parable, like all of Jesus' parables, had a surprise ending, an ending that forces us to think more deeply into God's ways, which are not our ways.

First of all, the Pharisee didn't have much of a prayer. Jesus said, "he spoke this prayer to himself." He was pretty much saying, "thank you God that I am not a sinner like everyone else -

even like this tax collector." He seemed to show no attachment toward God. His only attachment was to his own exalted image of himself. The tax collector, on the other hand, came to God for forgiveness and he received it. The key word here is "justified," which could also be translated "was made righteous." The tax collector went home justified; the other did not. The Pharisee's righteousness was of his own making; he didn't feel the need to ask God for anything. The tax collector's righteousness came as the answer to a prayer: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." It reminds us that holiness is God's gift to those who are open to his grace. All through the gospels, especially in Luke, Jesus is eager to offer his saving grace to anyone whose heart is open to it. This does not eliminate the need to live a holy life, to keep God's laws, to pray, to do good to others. The gospels certainly emphasize that, but the first step is to humble ourselves before the Lord and ask for his grace.

Archbishop Basil Hume, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, spoke to a friend shortly before his death in 1999. He said, "If only I could start all over again, I would be a much better monk, a much better abbot, a much better bishop. But then I thought how much better if I can come before God when I die - not to say thank you that I was such a good monk, good abbot, good bishop, but rather, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' For, if I come empty-handed, then I will be ready to receive God's gift." Not long after that the Cardinal died and the gospel of the Pharisee and the tax collector was read at his Mass. He knew how to bow low before God who blesses all those who come to him. (from Celebration, Preaching Resources, 10/24/10, pg 2)

As I reflected on today's gospel, I wondered if there was any hope for this Pharisee who tried to serve God with such fidelity all his life. Certainly! There is the hope that he would look deep into his own heart and realize how self-centered, pompous, judgmental and ungrateful he was in life. Maybe then he would do more than say thank you God that I'm better than everyone else. He would recognize that he is like everyone else, in need of God's saving love and grace for only Jesus is our Savior.

*Dear Friends, a few weeks ago I gave this homily. If you were here at Mass that day, you heard it. If you were not here, and there are reasons why some of our parishioners cannot be here on any given Sunday, I want to be sure you see it because it affects our very existence as a parish. I thank those of you who have increased your contributions since my appeal. I understand that many are doing all they can (it seems everything is going up except Social Security and pensions) and so I thank you for the sacrifices you make. If you did not hear this homily, please take a few minutes to read it. Fr. Joe*

### **31st Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle**

**October 31, 2010**

**HOMILY:** A young couple were busy finishing their college programs and didn't have the time or money for anything other than church and going to school. One Sunday as they were attending Mass, the priest gave a sermon about marriage. "The three most common problems in marriage that can lead to divorce," he said, "involve money, children and sex." At that the young husband whispered audibly to his wife, "Then we should be okay. We don't have any of those!." (from

Laughter, the Best Medicine, Reader's Digest, pg 290)

Well, today I need to talk about my least favorite topic: money. As important as it is, I do not mention it very often. I know all of you would get tired of hearing about it if I spoke about it all the time, and I would get tired of talking about it. But it's part of my job as pastor to keep you informed, so you don't find out at the last minute that we're in deep trouble financially. We're not in deep trouble, but you should know how things are going financially. I know all of you have a great love for St. Boniface or you wouldn't be here. I know that almost three-fourths of you drive past one or more parishes to come here and I am grateful that you do. Without your support and help, we would be history.

I try to limit my homily on finances to once a year and it has been about a year since I last approached the topic. I do send out letters about three times a year in order to thank people for their contributions, but those letters are primarily to say thanks and to let you know we are getting what you are giving.

Our fiscal year ends at the end of June. Two years ago we ended about \$58,000 in the red. It was only the second time since I came here in 1991 that we ran over our budget. Last year we did better, we ran about \$10,000 short. We had to take these losses out of our savings, which we were able to do, but we can't do that forever, and we can't print our own money to fill in the gaps. This past fiscal year we took a total of \$147,000 out of savings. We had to take that much out in order to pay for the protective covering over our stained glass windows (\$109,000), to make sure we could pay all other outstanding bills, and to give us a little cushion to begin this current fiscal year.

Where are we this year? We are behind; however, we hope to break even by the end of January. We are expecting to receive a bequest of \$30,000 (the lawyers are still settling the will) and with that and a good Christmas collection (hint! hint!) we hope to catch up with our expenses. I might mention that bequests have been a great help to us through the years. It's a good way to continue helping your parish even when you have left this world behind. In addition to your donations, it is also thanks to those who went before us that we continue to enjoy this beautiful facility.

When I send out my letters three times a year, I am so very often impressed and am grateful for people's generosity. I have also noticed that among those who do not use envelopes, a lot more five, ten and twenty dollar bills are among the loose cash in the collection, which is a big help. I think many people are becoming aware that what a person could buy 20 years ago now costs significantly more. Compared with last year, so far our income has gone up a couple of thousand, but so have our expenses. I promised last year I would give back half my salary to help out and I have. I'm not bragging or complaining, just letting our people know I love St. Boniface too, and if I ask people to sacrifice, I'm willing to sacrifice also. By the way, I use direct deposit. It's so much more convenient than writing checks every week.

You're probably saying to yourself, lets get to the bottom line. What exactly am I asking for?



Aware that it is a difficult time for everyone, I am going to ask for a modest amount: say a 5% increase if you can do it. I'll wager you will never miss it and I'll wager it will come back to you in some form or another. The Lord is not going to let any of us outdo him in generosity. I've always experienced that.

Our gospel today (Luke, 19, 1-10) gives us some hint of our Lord's attitude toward wealth. Jesus did have wealthy friends - people who helped support him and the disciples. Here we meet a man, Zacchaeus, a wealthy man, who didn't have to give all he had to the poor, which Jesus asked of some of his followers, but who helped others with what he had as well as making amends for past sins of dishonesty. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' change of heart. The lesson for us in today's gospel, I think, is to remember what we have is a blessing from God, to use our resources wisely and prudently and to not be selfish. To those who unselfishly help our parish to keep doing God's ministry here in Northside, I say to all of you, "Thank you." Amen.