

[Disclaimer: I often start the preparation of my homilies on Sunday or Monday of the previous week. As I go through the week, through my reading and my prayer and other encounters, the homily begins to come together. I assemble little bits from my reading, from my study, from my prayer, from my daily experiences and therefore, must admit that I always owe credit to the spiritual writers and scripture scholars I am reading at the time. I take what I have gleaned over the week and arrange it in a reflection that my prayer indicates is appropriate for this particular time in this particular parish.]

Most recent homily follows immediately below. Scroll down for past homilies.

The Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time October 4, 2009

The first reading of today's Mass and the gospel are the foundational scriptures that teach why we hold married life to be so sacred. We see in the first reading taken from the book of Genesis, the first book of the bible that marriage between a man and a woman has always been considered sacred. "A man shall leave his mother and father and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) And in today's gospel, Jesus quotes these exact same words: "A man shall leave his mother and father and cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh." and then adds the words "..... what God has joined let no man separate," raising the sacrament of marriage to the sacramental level we have held it to be every since. Marriage, the wedded love of one man and one woman for life, is the way that God has always intended us to live on the natural level as indicated in the book of Genesis and raised to the the grace filled supernatural level by Jesus, Himself.

These are truly beautiful readings this week. However, that is all I am going to say about the readings today because something has happened this past week that I think needs to be addressed in our faith family.

Last week the homily focussed on the four lessons of discipleship. And the third lesson of discipleship that I mentioned last week was about scandal. True disciples of Jesus are careful about giving scandal.

Well, we have had a terrible scandal this past week. It's been hard to hold our heads up as Catholics this past week. I'm sure you all have heard the horrible news of Bishop Raymond Lahey of Antigonish being charged with possession and importation of child pornography.

I think we will all agree with Archbishop Anthony Mancini of Halifax when he was questioned by a reporter at a press conference. He simply said that he has been completely thrown by it. He said "I am shocked and saddened by this devastating news." The Archbishop, who has been temporarily placed in charge of Bishop Lahey's former diocese, then went on to say, "It is a shame, a shame for him, (referring to Bishop Lahey) and for me and for all of us who are trying to do the best we can. It is difficult to deal with, to struggle on when our credibility takes another shot."

The following are selections of a letter that Archbishop Mancini read to the priests and people of the Diocese of Antigonish. (*see antigonishdiocese.com*)

Good Afternoon

.....
I have come to be with you in the midst of this sadness, pain and anxiety. I come with what I have, that is, my care and my concern. It is in this sense that I understand the shepherding role that I am asked to exercise here.

Let me first speak to those victims of past sexual abuse and to all for whom this news rekindles past pain. These recent revelations take on the character of victimization. I wish it were not so. This is not what our community of faith is supposed to be about.....

I am well aware that everyone is in shock. I am concerned with all who are trying to find any meaning in this devastation. I do not have the solution to this problem, or the capacity to take away the pain, or the means to erase this tragedy. It may be that some would wish for a quick solution to the problems we are facing, but all that I know is that whatever the solution may be, it will be a matter of collaboration and faith, and we all must do our part.

I have come today to meet with the priests and diocesan personnel, to reach out to all and to attempt to ensure that all will be cared for as best we can.

It is important to recognize that we are standing in a place of brokenness and vulnerability right now. In these very early days, we need to begin to look forward, not to escape this pain but to look at how we are being called to be the community of faith at this time. This calls for a great deal of hope, and belief that we do not do any of this alone. We are all in this together.

I want to encourage the priests to gather with each other, that they may help one another to come to the greater appreciation that they are brothers in Christ, and so find the strength to continue in the ministry entrusted to them. Also, I want to encourage parishioners to draw on each other's faith as you carry this painful burden and grieve for the losses that we are experiencing. If you can, bring this burden to the parish Eucharist, where we bring all our troubles. This is how we can continue to be the community of faith for and with one another in these times.

I am committed in spite of everything that has happened to try to help us all get to another place, more reflective of the Gospel we are about. This can be an opportunity for all of us to rediscover what it is to be the community of faith, to realize what the root of our faith really is, and how each of us helps to share the faith.

We are going through a very painful contemporary experience of the mystery of our Faith, which is all about Passion and Death yes, but it is also about the promise of Resurrection, without which we have no future. So I call on you to be hopeful because we believe in new life and new possibilities.

Archbishop Anthony Mancini

The comments I have personally heard is that this is a terrible betrayal. He's a bishop And that is very true. This is very sinful on many, many levels.

1. First, his own personal action is sinful. He has reduced the people in the photographs to objects. No one should be treated as an object.

2. It is sinful towards the victims of sexual abuse. Viewing any pornography is abusive. It makes those in the pictures, especially if they are children, victims of abuse.
3. Many people will find it hard to practice their faith because of this scandal. And so he has destroyed the faith of many, many people. I remember when I worked at KGH I would come across people who had been away from the Church for years. Some expressed that they just couldn't practice when they heard of cases like this one. They just found it too hard. What could I say to that? My response to them was "I am so sorry that choices or actions of some of my brother priests have understandably damaged your faith."
4. This scandal has planted seeds of suspicion against all priests. It has damaged our credibility and trust in us. I was reading a blog that asked: "Why are all priests pedophiles?" I can assure you we are not. In fact per capita the number is far less than the general population. That being said, even one case is terribly sinful and terribly scandalous.
5. Some blame celibacy. If priests could just get married. It's a very naïve comment. What does that say about marriage? Someone who worked in corrections responded: "I see a good number of pedophiles in my work and most of them are married and have children." So to blame celibacy is way too simplistic.
6. Some blame the media and ask why do these events get front page banner headlines? I don't blame the media. It's true the media doesn't report in a sensational way scandals in other faiths, that I'm assured do exist there by my non-Catholic friends. The media sensationalizes Catholic priests and bishops when they fall because it is a scandal. It is sinful. They are holding us to the truth. They are holding us to the standard that we uphold and that we should be upholding ourselves. So when one falls we should be taken to task. So I do not blame the media.
7. What do we do about this? When people point and accuse us and say that Catholicism must be wrong because of this we must humbly admit that one of our shepherds has indeed sinned and sinned terribly. As Archbishop Mancini said we must focus on the truth at the core of our faith..... Jesus Christ. Bishop Lahey failed in his discipleship of Jesus and his shepherding of his diocese. We condemn the failure. We do not condemn him. We need to pray for him. We need to pray for all who have been victimized by this. Those in the pictures and each one of us who, by association as Catholics, have been victimized.

There was a full expose on *As it Happens* on CBC radio. Barbara Budd read a very insightful honest email that had been sent in to her show: It said:

“Given the spotted history the Catholic Church has with dealing with child abuse, I anticipated your interview with Father Abbas (*who is the spokesman for the Diocese of Antigonish*) would be rife with slick, evasive, stock responses that spokespeople are want to give when their organizations have been challenged. What I heard turned that expectation on its head. What I heard was a man who was as genuinely saddened and shaken as he claimed he was. And yet humble enough to neither blindly defend nor pass judgment. I applaud the choice of Father Abbas, or the Church as it were, to respond unscripted. The sincere pain in his voice was enough to convince me that the Church is changing with the times to a more humane and appropriate reaction to the monstrous acts committed within its walls.” Email from Tracy Lothian Redden.

Indeed these are monstrous acts. Each one of us is genuinely saddened. Each one of us is genuinely shaken. We have all experienced the pain that was heard in Father Abbas’ voice. Yet like the author of the email said we must be humble enough not to blindly defend what is indefensible, nor to pass judgment.

In the gospel of John Jesus turned to the men who were going to stone the woman caught in adultery and said: “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.” This is a time for self examination as a Church. As we can see Bishop Lahey’s personal sinfulness has damaged the entire Church, the entire Body of Christ. This is true of our own personal sinfulness as well.

How do we respond? As I’ve said before. We must beat the devil at his own game. So now is not the time to back off from prayers but actually redouble them. Pray for victims of abuse of any kind, for healing and reconciliation. Pray for the people of the diocese of Antigonish..... imagine what they are going through. Pray for Archbishop Mancini who has had this thrust upon him. Pray for Bishop Lahey and all those who struggle with internet pornography. Pray for all those in positions of leadership in the church. Pray for all your priests. And pray for yourselves and all those whose faith has been severely challenged by this scandal.

It is sometimes very hard to have faith and hope when standing in the shadow of the cross. But above all don’t let your faith hope be shaken. There are no crosses without Resurrections.

So we turn to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We turn to St. John the Evangelist, St. Philomena and all the saints to intercede for the strength and humility we all will need at this time.

The Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 27, 2009

In the gospel we have just heard Jesus continues to travel from northern Galilee to Jerusalem. He continues to teach the disciples who he is and who his disciples are to be.

And in today's gospel he gives four very concrete lessons in discipleship:

1. A disciple of Jesus recognizes and rejoices in the presence of the Spirit in others as much as they recognize him in themselves. We have to look at ourselves and ask: "Are we disciples of Jesus?" Are we like John.... and Joshua in the first reading.... do we think that we have a monopoly on God's Spirit. This could be evident in many ways. Sometimes we think as Catholics that the only place God could be operating is in the Catholic Church. Sometimes we don't recognize the good things that God does in our Protestant brothers and sisters. Or we sometimes think that God is somehow limited to Christians. This sometimes leads us to think that there can't be anything good in the lives of Muslims, Hindus or the lives of non believers. We believe deeply and we know it to be true that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of all people. And he shares his Spirit and his goodness and love with many others and part of being a Christian is to see and to rejoice in the good things other people do. Now we can also apply this to ourselves as disciples of Jesus in a narrower way. We are sometimes jealous of the good things others do.... members of our family, our friends. Jesus lesson to us today is that his disciples rejoice in the goodness of God in the lives of others and not just in ourselves.

There are three other things in the gospel that I'd like you to think about with me today.

2. The second thing Jesus says: "Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because he belongs to Christ. Amen I say to you will surely not lose his reward." Jesus says "that anyone who gives a cup of water to someone who is thirsty is in some way giving that cup of water to Him." Jesus says elsewhere in the gospel that when we visit the sick, or feed the hungry or clothe the needy we not only do it to them but we do it to Jesus himself." Jesus is telling us that each one of us and every other person is Christ before us. That when we give a cup of cold water to someone who is thirsty it is as though Christ is before uswe are giving it to him. It is very important for us to see others that way to recognize Jesus in others.
3. The third lesson on discipleship is about scandal. He says: "Whoever causes one of these little ones to stumbleit would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." How many of us know what a millstone looks like? They are stones

where they grind wheat. They are big. Huge. If you get a millstone tied around your neck and you're thrown into the sea you don't come back. You sink to the bottom. And Jesus says if you and I scandalize God's little ones. ... and little ones doesn't mean a child here it means one of the disciples. If we scandalize Jesus' disciples it would be better for us to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around our neck. The word scandal comes a Greek word *scandalon* which was a rock on the road that might cause you to trip. So what we say or do or don't say or don't do that leads another person to trip or sin is a scandal. We can be an obstacle to someone else's progress towards God. And what does Jesus say about it..... it would be better for each one of us to have a millstone about our neck and thrown into the sea than to do that. Disciples for Christ are careful about giving scandal.

4. Fourth and final lesson of discipleship is the enormity of sin. We should take sin seriously. Sin is something to be avoided. Sin should be a really big thing to avoid for those of us who are disciples of Christ. And Jesus uses some pretty serious language here. "If your hand is an occasion of sin..... cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands into the unquenchable fire." Jesus is using hyperbole. A technique used by the Rabbis to make a strong point. Jesus doesn't really expect us to cut our hand off. But he is using such strong language to tell us we are to take our sin seriously. Not to trifle with it. Avoid it at all cost. Not get comfortable with it or even accept it. Not say I'll get around to dealing with it another time. Or to say "This isn't so bad" or "Well I'm not as bad as so and so." Sometimes we get very comfortable in our sin and Jesus is telling us today that we have to be vigilant in our spiritual lives and get rid of anything that keeps us further from him."

So four lessons of discipleship today.

- a) We have to be generous seeing and rejoicing in the good God does for others.
- b) We have to see other people as the presence of Christ to us and treat what them as we would treat Christ if he was standing before us. This is especially true of the people we find it difficult to like. This is especially true of the poor or those in need.
- c) #3.....Scandal is a horrible sin. It is worse than sinning by ourselves because we lead other people into sin.
- d) And no matter what our sins is we should be horrified by it. Disciples of Jesus take their sin seriously.

Four very powerful lessons in discipleship. Each of us wants to be His disciple or we wouldn't be sitting here today. So today we ask the Lord to help us live discipleship well.

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 20, 2009

It's rare that all three of our Scriptures are on a common theme. As you know the Old Testament reading and the gospel are always complimentary. But this week the second reading is also. All three touch on the virtue of meekness.

Blessed are the meek Jesus says in the Beatitudes.

Today's first reading is taken from the Book of Wisdom. It was written about 50 years before the birth of Jesus. So, historically, it is the last book of the Old Testament.

This part of the book we just heard is referred to as the speech of the wicked.

And we a righteous and upright man being persecuted and even tortured. And what does he do to deserve this... the only reason presented is that he was good. Those who lie in wait for him secretly desire what he has: his inner peace, his integrity, his close relationship with God. His goodness makes them squirm and feel uncomfortable. They feel the sting of what they could and should be and the reality of what they are. They could have peace, they could have integrity and a close relationship with God if they chose the same path as the good man in the reading..... but they would have to let go of their own selfish ways. It is far easier to bring him down. They try to snuff out his goodness through cynicism and negativity.

Now to our second reading. The basic theme of the letter of St. James is that it is not enough to be hearers of the Word but we must be doers of the Word or we fool ourselves. He constantly tells us we are to be doers of the Word.

In today's selection he says: "Where there is envy and selfish ambition there is disorder and wickedness of every kind."

Jealous and envy. Jealousy is different from envy. Envy is a discontent that is aroused by wanting what someone else has. Jealousy is pain at seeing another person prosper.

And really jealousy and envy are at the root of most that is wrong in our families, our parish, our work, our community and one could even argue among the states in our world.

In today's gospel Jesus continues on his journey to Jerusalem. He avoids the crowds so he can spend time with the disciples teaching them who he is and who

they should be. And he tells them something very important: That when he goes to Jerusalem, he will be handed over to men and they will kill him. And three days after his death the Son of Man will rise. He gets no response. And then when they get to Capernaum and they are inside the house he asks them: “What were you discussing on the way?” They didn’t want to answer. They had been arguing among themselves on the way, who was the greatest.

Just when Jesus is sharing this intimate moment of fear, when he is discussing the most important dimensions of His life. What are they doing? They are talking about who is more important.

Who is more important? We often place a lot of stock on that. In today’s gospel Jesus has an answer for that question.

*And I’d like to ask the assistance of someone to show you what the answer is.
[Ask one of the children to come forward.]
Real live props today.*

What did Jesus do when he heard they were talking about who was more important? He took a child. And placed her in the midst of the group. Jesus says to them if anyone wishes to be first he shall be the last of all and the servant of all. And taking the child and putting his arms around them and says. “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me and whoever receives me receives not me but Him who sent me.”

Children in Jesus’ time had no social standing. To say you should treat this young person as well as you treat a rabbi would have been seen as a very extraordinary and challenging teaching.

Jesus is saying that there is no standing in the community where there is one person more important than the other. We are all equally children of God and because of that sisters and brothers to one another.

What makes us important is not if we happen to be the priest or the most successful or the brightest, or the wealthiest person.

By Jesus’s standards what makes us important is if you know how to serve others. That’s what counts.

If we want to be first in the community we have to learn to be servants.

Mother Teresa’s wisdom again: The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is where it all culminates..... the fruit of love is service and the fruit of service is peace.

The connection between the first reading and this gospel is meekness. That willingness not to be so important. not to consider ourselves above anyone else..... We are called to serve rather than be served. To be able to serve one must be meek..... able to look beyond ourselves.

Meekness is certainly not weakness. Meekness is a virtue that includes gentleness ... also a characteristic of Jesus and therefore of us as his followers. Christians are to be gentle. Meekness is a virtue that includes moderation. It is a virtue that includes courtesy. It is a virtue that includes humility.gentleness, moderation, courtesy, humility.

Humility is not grovelling. It is not pretending we are not talented when we are. Humility is knowing the source of all the good that we are..... is God.

Humility means knowing the truth and living up to the truth especially in your relationships with others.

This isn't a virtue overly valued in our culture. Meekness and humility we say we admire thatbut our society really admires the powerful and the strong.

Jesus sets a radical standard before us today. The key to being truly one of his followers is to seek out opportunities to serve others rather than be served. A life of service is one of the key characteristics of our moral life as Christians. This is underscored in one of the titles of the Holy Father. *Servus Servorum Dei*. Servant of the Servants of God. It constantly reminds him that his very role is to be the Chief Servant to us, the servants of God, in a radical imitation of Jesus' selflessness.

With these particular scriptures before us we ask the Lord to make us more humble, to make us gentle, to make us meek. He wants to do that. And if he succeeds because of our cooperation with him we will change and those around us will change.

It is not enough to be hearers of the Wordwe must be doers of the Word.

The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2009

The Homily on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide.

As I mentioned last week I would like to address the issue of Bill 384 that is before the present Parliament; so a little longer homily than usual this week. The Bill proposes that euthanasia and assisted suicide be legalised in Canada. This is the third time this bill has been introduced. The other times an election was called and the bill ended. That might be the case again this fall if an election is called. However, it has been introduced three times and is obviously not going to go away.

First some definitions and clarifications:

Euthanasia is the deliberate killing of someone by action or omission, with or without that person's consent, for so called compassionate reasons. The person who commits euthanasia must intend to kill the person and must cause the death. A lethal injection would be an example of such an action. Withholding medical treatment which would greatly benefit the person would be an example of an omission. An example of this would be in some cases withholding surgery, hydration or food with the intent to shorten the person's life.

Euthanasia does not include:

- a) Respecting a person's refusal of treatment or request to discontinue treatment;
- b) Letting someone die naturally by withholding or withdrawing medical treatment when the medical treatment's burdens outweigh its benefits;
- c) Giving drugs to relieve pain and suffering even if a foreseen but unintended effect is to shorten life.

In assisted suicide a third person provides the means for the sick person to kill him or herself, by making available, for example, the quantity of pills which the person would use to end their own life.

Presently the Canadian Criminal Code treats euthanasia and assisted suicide as murder with a penalty of life in prison.

Both euthanasia and assisted suicide are urgent moral issues. It is important to understand why it is illegal in Canada. And it is essential to understand what the Church teaches about euthanasia and assisted suicide and even more importantly to understand why the Church teaches what it does.

According to our Catholic teaching there are two key principles at stake here:

- a) Primarily, all human life is sacred, from conception to its natural end. The Son of God took on flesh in Jesus Christ, thus, giving human life an unparalleled dignity. The right to life is the first of all rights. Without the right to life no other rights make sense.
- b) The Second key principle at stake here is that all human life has a relational quality, which depends on others and imposes a sense of responsibility for each other.

The foundational principle comes from the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." Which when said in the positive is, 'All human life is sacred. All life has dignity.' Not just a healthy life. Not just an able bodied life. Not just a beautiful life. Not just a young life. But all human life is sacred.

Catholics believe that life is a gift of God's love and goodness. And since it is a gift of God's love and goodness we do not have

absolute dominion over it; we are stewards, caretakers, not owners of life. Consequently, the time and circumstances of our birth and death are not ours to choose. Death is an inevitable part of life and a transition to eternal life.

Life is also relational. Human life is the ultimate basis for all of our relationships.

We need to ask what would be some of the consequences of allowing euthanasia or assisted suicide?

- 1) The frail, the poor, the elderly, the disabled and others who are vulnerable would be at the mercy of third parties who could exercise pressure on them to seek an earlier death as an option. The strong would be making decisions for the weak, rather than caring for them.
- 2) Secondly, the role of the physician and the patient's trust in the physician as we presently know it would be undermined.
- 3) Thirdly, palliative care would be marginalized. Palliative care is the area of specialization in medicine that does not focus on the cure of a disease but rather focuses on relieving the symptoms of a disease. It focuses on giving good quality end of life care and the management of pain, helping people live as comfortably as possible. A truly integrated palliative care team focuses on not just the physical pain caused by a disease, but the emotional, sociological and spiritual pain as well. When I was on staff at KGH I interacted a great deal with the palliative care team.
- 4) One of the key concerns if assisted suicide or euthanasia were permitted for the terminally ill on the basis of their suffering, how could it be denied to those who are depressed, infirm, frail or suffering for other reasons?

You may be aware that euthanasia and assisted suicide have been legal for decades in Holland. A very frightening statistic: in Holland, even though 2400 cases of assisted suicide have been reported each year. A 1991 government report found that the number was actually 12,000 that year and of those about half did not consent to or request to being killed. This is the consequence of allowing such laws to pass. Legitimizing euthanasia or assisted suicide, which allows one person to kill another or a person to kill themselves, diminishes all respect for human life. It would also erode the basic trust that human life will be protected — a trust that is essential to the functioning of any fully human society: a trust that is the responsibility of each one of us and our governments.

So if we are opposed to euthanasia and assisted suicide we must ask ourselves what are our obligations to the suffering or the dying person? Any one who is suffering must be provided with care, compassion and comfort.

This means

1. all available appropriate medical care must be made available to the sick person, which includes full information about their condition.

2. They must receive the very best of pain and symptom management.
3. They must receive all available social, emotional, spiritual and religious support.

This begs the question: 'How do you or someone who makes the decision for you when you are unable, decide on appropriate care?'

We are always to seek those measures that offer a reasonable hope of benefit and that can be obtained and used without excessive pain, expense or other serious inconvenience.

Anyone receiving care is never obliged to seek treatment when it is of no benefit, or when the burdens resulting from treatment are clearly disproportionate to the benefits hoped for or obtained.

This begs the question about the withdrawal of treatment:

If, for example, someone is completely being supported artificially, for instance on a ventilator. That without the ventilator breathing for them they most likely would not live. Is it considered ethical by the Church to withdraw that artificial means of support? Only, if there is no well founded hope that the person will recover then it is considered appropriate to withdraw the treatment and allow the person to die. It is very important to recognise here that the underlying disease or sickness is what is causing the person's death. By withdrawing treatment we are recognising the natural inevitability of their death caused by that disease. The artificial means, with little hope of recovery, is prolonging the inevitability of the person's death.

You would ask: Is the withdrawal or withholding of extraordinary or disproportionate treatment euthanasia. Definitely not. *The intention is not to cause death but to allow the person to die naturally; in euthanasia the intention is to directly cause death* – the patient does not die naturally but before his or her time.

When disproportionate treatment is withdrawn or withheld, the *cause* of death is the underlying disease or condition; in euthanasia the *cause* of death is the lethal injection or other means used. There is a great difference between *allowing to die* and *making die*.

Intention is a key element in distinguishing between euthanasia and other end-of-life decisions.

Sometimes the Church is accused of thinking that it is good for people to suffer. The Church, of course, does not see suffering as a good in and of itself and we all have a duty to do everything in our power to eradicate or at least alleviate it. We need to discover how to be compassionate, how to enter into and share the suffering of others.

There is no doubt that suffering challenges the very core of human life. Sometimes, in the face of overwhelming suffering, we must humbly acknowledge the limits of our capacity and the limits of our human condition – this is not easy to do in our technologically driven society where we are accustomed to getting what we want when we want it.

The Church recognizes that suffering can have great meaning and redemptive power in the lives of those who are suffering and those around them. When suffering has this meaning it can help to make it bearable. Christians believe that Christ brought human beings back to God through suffering through his Passion, Death and Resurrection. Each person is invited to freely accept this reconciliation. Christians also believe that those who unite their sufferings to Christ's with love participate in this work. Their feelings of anger and discouragement are replaced by quiet hope, and even joy. Suffering is no longer pointless. The suffering person finds in God, especially by receiving the Body of Christ, the courage and strength to live fully all the days of their lives in anticipation of the eternal life for which God created us all in His love. Scientific studies show over and over again that those who have a deep prayer life and deep religious practice endure suffering more peacefully and accept their death at the end of their life more peacefully.

Pope John Paul II, who in the last years of his life approached his own suffering and death with such great dignity once wrote: "The enigma of pain and death, which outside the Gospel crushes us, is illuminated through Christ and in Christ."

The alternative to euthanasia and assisted suicide is to provide people of all ages, particularly those who are seriously ill or disabled, including those in a terminal phase, with the utmost personal attention. This must include the best home care or palliative care available, along with the best pain control and alleviation of suffering. Such an approach involves the greatest respect for all the needs of the person who is suffering or dying — emotional, physical, social and spiritual — until his or her natural death. This type of care keeps a sick person from feeling abandoned.

Although palliative care cannot eliminate all suffering in all cases, it is an excellent way of affirming the life of the person who is dying. This is what is meant by death with dignity.

We need to encourage governments to devote more resources towards palliative care in hospitals, homes and hospices and for the education of health professionals and the public about palliative care.

It must be recognised that human dignity lies not in the exercise of control or even in the quality of life, but foundationally in the simple fact that we are human beings made in the image of God, made for life with one another.

We also give life dignity by the way we respond to it – by reaching out to the dying person with compassion and attending to their most basic needs – we need

each other in death in the same way that we need each other in life. Part of who we are as Christians is to be with those who suffer. To have compassion: which as you know means to suffer with. To be strong enough to be present with them. This form of accompaniment can be very painful and intense, but it is also full of possibilities for expressing love and gratitude, for spiritual growth and for reconciliation with God and one other. In my work as a priest I have seen some of the most powerful and beautiful acts of love around the bedside of a family member who is dying.

I know that as I have been speaking many of you have been thinking of the last few days of dearly departed loved ones. As I was preparing this homily, I was certainly thinking of my own dear mother's death from cancer and how she died. I want to assure you that there were very few times in my four years on staff at KGH that I would have had ethical questions regarding end of life decisions made by the medical personnel. They do a good job with the resources they have available to them. As Catholics we must lobby our government, not only to prevent this bill, but to provide increased funding into research of end of life care and pain management so that all can truly die with true dignity.

I've given you a lot here. A copy of this homily is at the back. It will also be posted on the parish's website. Please take it home. Prayerfully consider it. If you have any questions don't hesitate to call me or come to discuss this. I would encourage all of you to write your Member of Parliament and the Prime Minister expressing your opposition to Bill 384. The addresses are in the bulletin. I've quoted the great 18th century British parliamentarian and philosopher, Edmund Burke to you before. "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

The Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 6, 2009

Before I speak about the Scriptures today I'd like to speak briefly on this Labour Day weekend about work in our Catholic thinking.

That great pope Blessed John XXIII was once asked by a very nervous diplomat trying to make conversation: "Holy Father, how many people work in the Vatican?" Pope John looked him and smiled and replied: "Oh ...about half!"

The bible is a bit ambivalent about work. In the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, work is presented as one of the curses that flowed from the original sin of Adam and Eve. Because they sinned Adam is told that he is going to have to provide for his family by work, by the sweat of his brow. So in some sense work is seen as a curse.

At the same time God in that same book of the bible, on the very first page, God is presented as one who is working 6 out of 7 days creating the world. And then

human beings are given the task of being stewards of His creation, since we have a responsibility to continue the work that God has begun.

So there is that ambivalence, work is a curse and work is somehow a participating in the creating power of God.

That ambivalence in the bible is sometimes an ambivalence in your lives too, as it is in mine. Sometimes work is a burden, we wish we didn't have to do it, and sometimes it is exciting and we do understand that work is a participation in the Divine Creativity. And our responsibility for the world is one we embrace and we want to give it back to God better than we received it.

Labour Day is a time when Christians are called to think about that; not just a theoretical or theological way but to look at our lives and ask: "How do I perceive my work?" First of all we need to ask ourselves do we understand the dignity of labour? For those of you who are employers it is important that you don't see the people who work for you as chattel, as somehow the people you own; there should be a partnership between the owner and those who work for the owner that respects the dignity of everyone. And if we are workers it is important for us not to feel as victims..... to put in a good days work for the salary we receive and to work generously, and selflessly and nobly, because we see work as something that is good.... not just something that is necessary but something that is good for the world.

A big worry that we should have today is the way that work consumes us. I came across this stat recently: It said that between the 1970's and the year 2000 we work on an average one more month per year, than people did prior to the 70's. One more month.....The average worker in the last 40 years works one whole month more than they did prior to 1970. Now that truly is amazing; there are still only 12 months in the year. There are still only 24 hours in each day. Where does that extra month come from? We just need to look at our lives. It comes from Saturday.... people didn't work on Saturday..... it comes on your Sunday, it comes on your lunch hour.... the same source noted that the average lunch hour is 37 minuteseven that sounds a little high. it comes from your evenings and it comes from the attention that would be given to family and the attention that is given to God. The family meal together is almost disappearing in our culture because of work.

Don't get me wrong! It is very important not to be lazy. But it is equally important not to be obsessed by work especially when it damages our relationships in our family and with God.

It is also important that in our community we see that workers are paid justly. That they receive a living wage. enough to support their family. The reason people work so many hours is because they have to to support their family. This is not good because ultimately family life suffers.

So that's a few thoughts for us to be aware of on this Labour day weekend.

In the Gospel a group of people bring this poor man to Jesus.... this man is isolated from the community because he couldn't speak and he couldn't hear. ... and they begged Jesus to lay hands on him. And Jesus did.... he took him aside and put His fingers in his ears and He spit on His finger and touched his tongue. If it were up to us we might have done it in a much more sanitary way it seems strange to us.... but you know this is part of every Baptism.... During the baptism the priest will recall this very gospel and touch the ears and the lips of the child being baptised because the Church sees in this moment in some sense the sacramental life of the Church. We are not bodiless spirits we have bodies... and the way God touches us spiritually is to use material things. And the sacraments of the Church are the ways in which Jesus continues to touch us today.

In the Eucharist he continues to touch us through bread and wine that become his body and blood. In the Sacrament of Confession he touches us through the forgiveness of the priest who is there to represent the saving and forgiving love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus doesn't just say to this man: "You can hear. You can speak," but he touches him. And Jesus continues to touch you and me in the sacramental life of the Church.

So he put his fingers in the man's ear and spitting touched his tongue. Then he looked up to heaven and groaned!!! Jesus was at one with this person. He experienced compassion for him. Compassion means 'to suffer with' so Jesus had a profound experience of this man's isolation and pain. The Lord loves us and plunges himself into our experience. He is with each and every one of us in our isolation, in our pain, and in our joy as well.

Then Jesus said to him, ef-fatha "Ephphatha" which is the Aramaic word "be opened" And the gospel tells us that the man's ears were opened and also his speech.

The Lord Jesus wants to do for us spiritually what he did for this man physically.... and maybe for some of us physicallybut for all of us spiritually ...because to some degree everyone here is deaf... spiritually

Today the gospel forces us to ask ourselves how we are deaf spiritually? Often we hear the gospel and we come up with a good list in our heads of who that gospel applies to but neglect to apply it to ourselves. That 's one way of being deaf spiritually. Thinking the gospel message applies to someone else but not to us. And we can be spiritually deaf in the opposite way as well. We can be so preoccupied with our own needs that we are deaf to the needs of those around us.... even often those in our very own homes. We often don't hear the Lord's call to prayer; we don't hear the Lord's call to conversion.

Baptism is the sacrament where Jesus unplugs our ears, but we spend years building up spiritual ear wax so we don't hear ... so we ask the Lord in the Liturgy today that we be spiritually alive to His word in our lives.

The gospel goes on to say that when the man was healed He began to speak plainly.

This gospel forces us to ask ourselves what are some of the attitudes that prevent us from speaking plainly. A couple of examples: Someone is telling a racist joke and you know it is offensive..... or telling a joke say about women that is below their feminine dignity and we just keep quiet. Sometimes we don't speak out of complacency we say "... that really doesn't matter, I'm not going to say anything about that!"

How often do we sit by and hear someone's good name dragged through the mud and not speak up in their defence or at the very least change the subject?

Then there is that real fear of speaking the truth be it to the power, to the culture..... we are terribly politically correct. we are afraid to speak about abortion to those who promote it....in your bulletin today there is an insert about Bill 384 proposing the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide..... will we have the courage to get informed and speak out about that I will speak in depth on this next week.... About tough issues like this we often think this doesn't apply to me or we feel we don't know enough about it or we are quite simply afraid to speak against the culture..... that is really common. We are afraid that people will be offended or they won't like us.... or our relationship with them will be strained.

Pope John Paul II when once asked what his favourite piece of Scripture was. He immediately replied John 8:32 "The Truth will set you free."

Each of us, myself included, can be hard of hearing in the face of the truth,we sometimes don't hear it well.

At the end of the gospel Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone. The more he ordered it the more they proclaimed it.

They didn't pay any attention to Jesus. But we do. If there is one commandment we often do keep about Jesus it is that one.... This gospel forces us to ask Do we speak about Jesus to others?....Do we proclaim the gospel? ... Do we let people know that Jesus is the Lord of our lives? Do we invite others to know him?... we really do believe and yet do we speak plainly about Jesus?

Last week in the letter to St. James we were exhorted to be doers of the word and not just hearers. The gospel today calls each of us to that same level of action.

And to quote once again Pope John Paul II's favourite piece of Scripture in its context: John 8:31-32 "Jesus then said to the Jews who believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

The Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 30, 2009

Have you ever noticed how in the teaching of Jesus....He likes to point

“Look at the birds of the air,” He says. “Look at the children,... look at the mustard seed,... look at the flowers of the field!”

He loves to point. He loves to point out things.

And in our gospel reading this morning Jesus points once again. But this time he points within. He asks us to look inside. Because that is where faith, and salvation and grace and pure religion take place. Inside, within, in our heart, in our soul. The kingdom of God is within, Jesus so often preaches.

He also bluntly warns us that from inside also comes sin, and evil and defilement.

Inside, within the heart, in the soul, is the play ground of both the devil and the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus points within we get nervous. We're feel put on the spot. We're uncomfortable. We don't mind it when he is pointing at things without. But we get skittish when he points within.

We'd rather say: No wait a minute Lord all the trouble all the problem and all the sin and all the injustice.....it's all out there Lord. The problem is not within me. The problem is all with them. The difficulty is not myself. The difficulty is with others, or structures or with THE system.

Some of you will remember that great Bishop Fulton Sheen..... in one of his famous sermons he once asked if we would ponder how different the story of our salvation would have been ...had Adam simply owned up to eating the forbidden fruit.

Bishop Sheen asked us to picture what would have happened if God upon confronting Adam with eating the forbidden fruit would have heard Adam say: “I'm sorry Lord..... your right. I disobeyed you. All you've done for me is love me. And given me everything I need and I've abused the free will you have given me and I have wrongly chosen evil. All I can ask is your mercy.”

Bishop Sheen wondered that if that had been Adam's response we might still be in paradise.

Of course we all know the rest of the story! When our Lord confronts Adam, Adam says “Oh Lord, not me,not me....I'm not the problem.....Eve, Eve, the woman, she's the one responsible.”

And when the Lord looks to Eve, Eve says: “Oh Lord it is not me, it's not my fault....it's that serpent there ...he is the culprit.”

Pointing out, away from ourselves, becomes a family trait of humanity that we have all learned well. Instead of pointing within as Jesus would have us do.

Way back in the 6th C..... An early monk by the name of Daritaeus of Gaza wrote in his rule of life. The root of all disturbance... if one is to go to its source... is that no one will blame himself.

Not so long ago there was a person in my office..... very distraught over a very serious issue..... something of their own doing, a hole they had dug themselves..... and they made a statement that really took me aback..... They said: ``Why has God done this to me Why did my faith allow this to happen.`` Very gently, and I mean VERY gently, I pointed out to them that they had made some very serious choices that were very damaging to key relationships in their life. Obviously their faith had not made the choices and God had not made the choices, but they had made the choices!....We so naturally immediately point away from ourselves.

Jesus points within. Because that's where His kingdom is.

A book that I have just finished on St. John Marie Vianney, that great priest, whose 150th anniversary of his death we are celebrating this year in the Year of the Priest, talks about our intentions, the quality of our heart.

It says: "The kingdom of God is within us, God weighs the heart and not the work, He looks not so much at what we do, but at why we do it.

"It is in the secret laboratory of the intention that the unrefined metal of our commonest actions is transformed into purest gold.

What is a glass of water in the Universe? Give it to a poor man, and it is the purchase –money of eternity.

That's very good. What is a glass of water in the Universe? Give it to a poor man, and it is the purchase –money of eternity.

The whole of human life consists in little actions which accomplish great duties."

In Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta's words "It becomes something beautiful for God."

The gospel reminds us that it is within that the battle is waged: with those thoughts of anger, lust, envy, jealousy, impatience, resentment, lack of forgiveness.

Now many people feel very, very sinful when they are plagued by these sinful thoughts. Let's be very clear here..... these thoughts in and of themselves are not sinful. The fact they pop into our minds does not make them sinful..... They are part of who we are as fallen human beings. It is what we do with them that can become sinful. If we entertain them, if we allow the movie of revenge, or the movie of jealousy or the movie of lust to start to roll in our mind..... you know that movie..... the script often goes like this..... oh the next time I see them I'm going to say this, this and this..... It is when the movie starts to roll. Then the thoughts become sinful.

So the goal is not to have these full length feature films going on in our heads..... to catch them the moment they enter our heads and not to entertain them even for a second.

At the beginning of June I gave you a little prayer exercise to help with this kind of thing. I'd like to refresh your memory and encourage you to use it over and over again.

If you are plagued by thoughts of unforgiveness, by resentment say.... for a particular person, if a particular person drives you crazy..... Choose a prayer.... a substantial prayer.... Like the Our Father, the Hail Mary, The Memorare.... One of our traditional prayers and every time that person pops into your mind.... Before the feature film begins..... pray that prayer in its entirety.... Every time. If you do this for a period of three or four weeks.... pray this prayer in its entirety each time that person pops into your mind you will be amazed at how thoughts of that person will be transformed..... your heart will change it will become much more peaceful and the resentment will disappear. They may not have changed. But your heart and your way of dealing with them has.

The same is true with thoughts of lust, thoughts of revenge.... The minute the thought pops in... start praying the prayer..... and if you do this religiously for 3 to 4 weeks the thoughts will reduce drastically.

Traditionally we call this custody of the imagination..... exerting spiritual self control and taking spiritual steps to reduce the occasion of sin in our lives.

This even works for things like taking the name of the Lord in vain.... using our good Father's name as a curse word rather than the great blessing it is. If you say the prayer in its entirety every time you curse, you will be amazed at how drastically that habit is reduced and even extinguished after only one month.

This even works for griefwhen we are really missing our departed loved ones. Say this prayer for them.every time they pop into your mind and your loneliness will be lessened. The pain of missing them will be diminished.

My favourite prayer in times of need is the Salve Regina, Hail Holy Queen
Mother of Mercy.....

So your homework today is to come up with a prayer and to use it. There's
nothing to lose and a great deal of peace to be gained.

The kingdom of God is within.

Twenty first Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 23, 2009

We have just heard the last section of the sixth chapter of John's gospel that we
have been meditating on over the past five weeks. As I mentioned last week this
chapter is given a preeminent place in our Catholic thinking because of its strong
Eucharistic themes.

This Sunday I would like to examine in detail the evidence from Scripture why
we believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. There is nothing in
Scripture that contradicts what we believe as Catholics. And there is nothing we
believe that cannot be supported in Scripture.

When asking a question like "Why do we believe in Jesus' real presence in the
Eucharist?" it is always good to look to the Old Testament first. The Old
Testament foreshadows what is held in the new. It is a preparation for its
fulfillment in Jesus Himself and therefore it is good to look there for some hints
as to why we believe what we do about the Eucharist. I would like to direct you
to the Book of the prophet Malachi which is one of the last books in the Old
Testament. .

Malachi 1:11 states: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is
great among the nations and in every place incense is offered to my name and a
pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lords of hosts."
Catholics should be very familiar with this passage because we hear it at Mass
very often but in a slightly different form. Instead of "From the Rising of the sun
to its setting"..... we say "From East to west a perfect offering is made." Sound
familiar. That is one of the first lines just before the words of consecration in the
Eucharistic prayer I have been using during Ordinary Time.

When Malachi was written some 450 years before Christ, God's name was not
great among the Gentiles. A pure offering was not being made to Him from all
the nations. So this is a prophecy of times to come ... after Jesus Christ. Because
it was only after Jesus Christ that the gospel was taken among the Gentiles and
that God's name was made great among the Gentiles,... among all the nations.
This passage in the prophet Malachi says that at some future date the Gentiles, all
the nations will offer incense and a pure offering . Now, what could they be
talking about here? What is the only pure offering that has ever been made to
God? His Son. Jesus Christ is the only pure offering. What do we do at the
Mass? We offer...we re- present the offering that Jesus himself made on the cross
to the Father in heaven. And throughout the world the Mass is offered every

moment, throughout all of the nations. This prophecy is fulfilled in our Catholic celebration of the Mass.

Now let's go to the New Testament: We heard last Sunday in John chapter 6 vv. 53-55. "Truly, Truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." (John 6:53-55)

Jesus says his flesh is real food and his blood is real drink and that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood to have life..... to have life in us. We as Catholics believe exactly what Jesus says. We take him literally. We believe what the word of God is very clearly telling us here.

Now put these passages from John together with what Jesus the Christ said at the Last Supper. "This is my body. This is my blood." Which we find in Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22. In all of these accounts of the Last Supper Jesus uses the word "is." Not "is similar to," or "is symbolic of," but the word "is." This is my body. This is my blood. He doesn't say this bread is my body. This wine is my blood. He clearly says "This is my body.... This is my blood."

Now let's look at what St. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 11. Vv. 23-29. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Again we see the word "is". This is my body. In these four places in Scripture, Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul, we get a very clear picture that Jesus was not talking symbolically but literally when he said to eat his body and drink his blood. And listen what St. Paul says a little further in First Corinthians chapter 11 v. 27: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in any unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord." How can you be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord if it isn't the body and blood of the Lord. So it must be his real body. And in v. 29 Paul goes on to say: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." Without discerning the Lord's body? How can you discern the Lord's body if the Lord's body isn't there, if it is only symbolic? Paul was talking literally.

Now let's go back to John chapter 6. If Jesus was speaking symbolically we need to ask why in v. 66, as we heard in today's gospel, many of Jesus' disciples walked away from him. After they heard his explanation they walked away. They said "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (John 6:60) "After this many of his disciples no longer went around with Jesus." (John 6:66) They walked away because they understood Jesus literally. As did the Jews, as we heard last Sunday, in v. 52, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" But did Jesus say to them "No you misunderstood me, come back!! I really meant that it is

like my flesh, it is a symbol of my flesh.” No he didn’t call them back to say they had misunderstood him. In fact. He let them go! He let them go and then he turns to the twelve who remain and asks: “Will you also go away?” (John 6:67) And then Peter replies with some of the most beautiful words recorded in the gospel. Peter answers for all of them and for all of us. He says: “Lord, to whom shall we go? “ Peter and the other apostles understood Jesus to be speaking literally. They didn’t know how what he was saying could be true, but they understood him to be speaking literally. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68-69)

And one final point:

If we look closely at John 6 v. 58 “he who eats this bread will live forever.”

And in v. 51 he says the same thing: “if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” Now what bread is he talking about. V. 51 supplies the answer. “and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Jesus is talking about the flesh that he will give for the Life of the world. The flesh Jesus gave for the life of the world is real. He gave his flesh for the life of the world on the cross.

So here at Mass, we participate in the Last Supper and Good Friday, where Jesus gave us the Eucharist in His Sacrifice in the Upper Room and on the cross. He took the bread at the Last Supper, blessed, broke it and gave it to the disciples and said “Do this in memory of me!” He completed that act on the cross. All the graces that were poured forth upon the world Jesus’ Sacrifice in the Last Supper and Good Friday we participate anew each time we celebrate Mass.

Like the disciples we are not certain exactly how this takes place. But because he said it we know it does take place and that every time we receive him in Holy communion we are truly receiving Our Lord and Saviour: body, blood, soul and divinity.

In Holy Communion we have the Lord within us. He loved us so much he wanted us to have his strength. So He gave us Himself so that we can face our lives here on earth with His grace, His strength.