

090510 23rd Sunday in OT

There are perhaps 250 of us present here at this Mass. Thanks be to God. Some are here because they deeply love the Lord. Some are here who hope to have a real and deeper relationship with Jesus. Some are here because it's what they've done for years. They wouldn't do anything different. Some are here because they want to be nourished -- to be fed on God's Word and Christ's body. Some are here because they need ... they want to be challenged with a message to take home and to think about in the days to come. Perhaps a few are here to be told that everything is okay -- don't preach to me -- don't tell me what the Church says to do... Jesus loves me and that's all I need to know. And so -- there may be a hundred and more differing mindsets that have to be penetrated by God's Word and His Grace.

So here we are -- so many opinions and backgrounds -- Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? As the Bible says, "when things are in heaven, who can search them out?"

What I can say is that I have been in prayer before coming to this liturgy today. I've been in prayer about the readings... about those who would come to worship ... and about trying to be an instrument of God's will here in His Church in Payson. In my office at home, I have a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I looked at it and prayed that I could have the endorsement of God's grace and feel some sense of the words that Paul wrote in our 2nd reading: that Jesus has sent our priest, Fr. Bill and this unworthy deacon Tom -- that Jesus wants to use us to lead you in worship, in Scripture, in the celebration of the Eucharist and back to a refreshed love of Christ, His Father and the Holy Spirit... and also a love of the Mother of Jesus and Holy Mother, the Church.

Love is what Scripture and the Church teach us about God... And with all of our attitudes and criticisms and pettiness -- so much of it would go away if we saw that God first loved us -- long before we thought we knew him... and if we understood this eternal, unrelenting flawless love -- it would give us openings to be docile and to believe we can be here today -- and that God can start a grace-movement that will make things different in our lives.

I was sitting on our patio with a dear friend the other day. We were talking about struggles and challenges. This friend had some struggles... being worried about making mistakes with the kids... about being able to concentrate on our prayers... about struggling with distractions. And I tried to share a vision with this friend that God's judgment is so much beyond our shallow ways of thinking.

I wonder if any of you remember a book of a few years ago entitled ***The 5 People You Meet in Heaven***? It is a novel written by Mitch Albom and it recounts the life and death of an old maintenance man named Eddie. After dying in a freak accident, Eddie finds himself in heaven where he encounters five people who have significantly affected his life, whether he realized at the time or not. Mitch Albom dedicates the book to his uncle Edward Beitchman. Eddie Beitchman was a war veteran who died at 83 after living a mostly simple life and feeling like he had not accomplished everything in life that he 'should' have. And so one message of my homily today is that many of us... maybe even most of us will never get the opportunity to know how positively we have effected others -- even by the simplest of things. Today - - while I believe we all need to really be challenged to do better -- today I salute the good that many or most of you have done.

Let me give you an example. Back in Colorado, there was another deacon and he retired from our parish the summer I was ordained. One theme that I remember him preaching on was this very idea that we won't know until heaven the good that we have been capable of. He often used the example of Catholics who went to daily Mass.

And this older deacon said that we would never understand the impact of our cars being in the parking lot each day of the week... other people... former Catholics... fallen away Catholics... non-Catholics who would drive by going to work... they'd see our cars in the parking lot. And we would NEVER know the power of God's Grace to penetrate hearts that are in need of repair or conversion. And so even your five year old car being in the parking lot can be the instrument of God's love...

Now -- as Paul Harvey said -- let me tell you the rest of the story. After that older deacon retired -- I was the only deacon in our parish back in Estes Park. I used to do weekly Communion Services on the pastor's days off. So I was on the altar quite frequently doing morning Communion Services. One day, I happened to see a young man -- perhaps 35 or so sitting in the back row of the Church. I had never seen him before and I wondered who that young fellow might be.

Just after I finished the Communion Service -- I went back into the sacristy to take my alb and stole off... and this young man came almost rushing in... "I saw the cars outside... and I need to talk to you privately... Please I need to talk to you." I tried to object -- I'm not a priest -- I can't hear your confession if that's what you want.

“I don’t care I need to talk to you... now...” So I asked the sacristan who was standing there to leave us alone... there was a chair in the room and I asked the fellow to sit down... All I can tell you is that what poured out of him was a lengthy story of love and marriage and betrayal and sin and hurt and tears... It turned out to be the first ‘consulting confession’ I’ve ever heard without the power to give absolution...

But what I want you to hear is the opening words from the young man... “I saw the cars outside.” It could have been just me doing the Communion Service with no one present -- it took the witness of the people and their cars outside to make that event happen.

Okay -- now today for those who came to Mass wanting or needing challenge and something to take home... here it is... My challenge to you: God didn’t put us on this earth -- creating us and plopping us here to try to figure out simply how to exist until we die... We’ve been baptized and each of us is given a call... a challenge.. a mission. If you are beyond your child-rearing or working years and you aren’t involved in some other area of gospel-based service -- God may be calling you through my words to start by coming to daily Mass... perhaps starting with once or twice a week..

Because of the damage caused by abortion and other anti-life actions by our government, God may be calling you to become active in Respect life activities. Like joining us for the Life Chain peaceful demonstration down on the Beeline Highway on Sunday, October 3rd.

Some of you might want to be closer to the liturgies and service to the Church. God may be inviting you -- again through the foolishness of my words to consider becoming a deacon.... or a priest... or a consecrated religious woman. How awesome... Some may not have been contributing time, talent and treasure to the Church or St. Vincent de Paul ... Ding! Ding!

Some may have been married outside of the Church because of a prior divorce situation... please consider talking to a priest or deacon to start the process and see if you can have your marriage sacramentalized and recognized and blessed by the Church.

In summary my friends, we may get to meet five and more people if we make it to Heaven... but the first One we will meet will be the Just Judge. Let's calculate the cost and make sure of our preparations for the journey to that meeting.

Reading 1

Wis 9:13-18b

Who can know God's counsel,
or who can conceive what the LORD intends?
For the deliberations of mortals are timid,
and unsure are our plans.

For the corruptible body burdens the soul
and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many
concerns.

And scarce do we guess the things on earth,
and what is within our grasp we find with difficulty;
but when things are in heaven, who can search them out?
Or who ever knew your counsel, except you had given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?
And thus were the paths of those on earth made straight.

Ps 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14-17

Responsorial Psalm

R. (1) In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
You turn man back to dust,
saying, "Return, O children of men."
For a thousand years in your sight

are as yesterday, now that it is past,
or as a watch of the night.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
You make an end of them in their sleep;
the next morning they are like the changing grass,
Which at dawn springs up anew,
but by evening wilts and fades.

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.
Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
And may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge.

Phmn 9-10, 12-17

Reading 2

I, Paul, an old man,
and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus,
urge you on behalf of my child Onesimus,
whose father I have become in my imprisonment;

I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you.
I should have liked to retain him for myself,
so that he might serve me on your behalf
in my imprisonment for the gospel,
but I did not want to do anything without your consent,
so that the good you do might not be forced but voluntary.
Perhaps this is why he was away from you for a while,
that you might have him back forever,
no longer as a slave
but more than a slave, a brother,
beloved especially to me, but even more so to you,
as a man and in the Lord.
So if you regard me as a partner, welcome him as you would me.

Lk 14:25-33

Gospel

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus,
and he turned and addressed them,
"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother,
wife and children, brothers and sisters,
and even his own life,
he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me
cannot be my disciple.

Which of you wishing to construct a tower
does not first sit down and calculate the cost

to see if there is enough for its completion?
Otherwise, after laying the foundation
and finding himself unable to finish the work
the onlookers should laugh at him and say,
'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.'
Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down
and decide whether with ten thousand troops
he can successfully oppose another king
advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops?
But if not, while he is still far away,
he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms.
In the same way,
anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions
cannot be my disciple."