

Fr. John's Homily - 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 24, 2021

JMJ CHS

What I say during my homilies is often influenced by what's on the calendar. And when I say calendar, I'm talking about the one we get every year at Christmas time donated to the Holy Spirit parishioners by the *Borek Jennings funeral Home*.

Today, for instance, is *World Mission Sunday* and I learned that from the calendar. We should, therefore, recognize those individuals who have answered the call to go off and *baptize all nations, teaching them to observe all the things* that were taught to us by Jesus. This year's celebration is a bit more poignant. There is a hostage crisis in Haiti involving some Christian missionaries, including some from Michigan. We want to pray for a peaceful resolution of the situation. Being a missionary can be a dangerous business. It always has been, and I presume it always will be. We are, after all, in a spiritual battle. The devil doesn't like missionaries because they are on the front lines of the battle.

Last week I looked at the calendar and found out that it was *Laity Sunday*. So I recognized that fact and acknowledged all of your efforts on behalf of spreading the good news of the kingdom through your various ministries. Forgive me if I didn't send all of you a Hallmark card. But I had never heard of Laity Sunday before. I thought it was something new and an initiative of the Catholic Church, perhaps a sister celebration to the Priesthood Sunday which we celebrated the week before. I was wrong on both counts. Laity Sunday started in the Methodist Church, back in the 1920s.

Now *Priesthood Sunday* was definitely something that came out of the Catholic Church, and is more recent. It was started by a priest organization that felt we needed to "talk up" our profession a bit in the light of the sexual abuse scandal of 2002. Our morale was low and we needed a booster shot. We need to first remind ourselves of the beauty of our profession, and then to do what we could to remind you of the importance of this particular calling. I didn't say anything that week about the priesthood, but I would like to mention that I did get one card. Thank you very much for the encouragement.

But what I failed to say two weeks ago I would like to say today because of the second reading from the *Letter to the Hebrews*. It's about the priesthood and so the timing is right. Maybe the first thing I should say is that I composed these words in my chapel up at the rectory, in front of the Tabernacle, with a stole around my neck. The stole is the symbol of the priesthood and it would seem to me that the best place to assemble my thoughts would be in the Real Presence of Jesus. Abiding with Him, listening to Him, and asking Him questions, asking for the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so that my words might actually bear fruit. How could I possibly go wrong?

Before I start, I thought I would say a few words about the *Letter to the Hebrews*. It is an unusual piece of literature from the late New Testament that seems more like an essay. There is a tradition of it being attributed to St. Paul, but it is different from his other letters. It is deeper,

more theological, and he doesn't identify himself like he does in his other letters. They often have long greetings and salutations to the various communities like Galatia, Corinth, Rome, or even his private letters to Timothy or Titus, or Philemon. Some scholars have speculated that it was Paul's ideas but may have been dictated to someone else who served as a secretary.

The reading says some very important things that should help us better understand the nature of this most special vocation. It begins by the author addressing the laity. "*Brothers and sisters*", he says, "*every high priest is taken from among men and made their representative before God.*" I suppose he could be talking only about the bishops of the church, including the Pope, but I think it is certainly true of all of us down here in the "lowerarchy" as well. The parish priest is also a "high priest" to his particular church and flock. God the Father in the Old Testament said "*I will send you shepherds, shepherds after my own heart*". Jesus fulfills that promise when he said to his disciples, "*You did not choose me but I have chosen you, to go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last.*"

Vocation calls are for real. But they can also be quite mysterious. As we look at some of the characters that Jesus has chosen from the apostles right up to the present, we have to wonder, what was he thinking? I'm not bragging when I say that my call was pretty dramatic while others are really pretty bland. I think the Lord had to knock me over the head to persuade me.

I have used this example before, but I think it is a good one, not unlike mine. Once again, it involves Fr. Ed Fride of Christ the King Parish in Ann Arbor. He got the call and, like me, was not interested. But he found out that God is relentless. One day in his frustration he opened up his Bible and put his finger down, and was prepared to do whatever the passage told him. He opened to Psalm 110. Where it said "*Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.*" He slammed the Bible shut and gave God another chance to get it right. Being very careful to not return to the same page, he dug his finger into the very end of the Bible and opened up to today's verse from the Hebrews, which referred back to Psalm 110. Sometimes the coincidences are so incredible that, well, you'd better do what you are told.

The word *priest* comes from the Greek word *presbyter*. But it essentially describes a person who, without regard for a specific religion, offers up a sacrifice. The priest of the Judeo-Christian tradition, or a pagan priest, received the offerings of the people, like grain, or vegetables, or turtle doves or cattle or little lambs. These would be placed on the altar and burned up. The Passover sacrifice of the Old Testament is always a little spotless male lamb with none of his bones broken. At the Last Supper Jesus takes on the role of the Lamb of God. And from the words spoken at that meal, we say and do the same thing at every Mass. Thus, we call it *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*. We offer up Jesus, the Lamb of God, as a perfect, spotless sin offering to the Father so that sins may be forgiven.

And there are many other tasks that the priest is called upon to perform. Like Moses, he listens to the complaints of the people and tries to make just decisions. He teaches classes, he counsels and consoles. He witnesses weddings and forgives sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. He is commanded to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and even cast

out demons. And through all of this, he is encouraged to be patient and understanding of those who are ignorant or in error.

The Hebrews passage, however, points out that the priest also suffers from his own weaknesses, and so makes a sin offering for himself first. We are all too aware of our own shortcomings and failures, but I think it is important for you to remember that as well. Priests have traditionally been put up on a pedestal. More so in some cultures than others. And we certainly have been humbled lately with so many from our ranks having fallen short of the mark. So please pray for your priests.

I am of the opinion that Jesus has plans to restore the Catholic priesthood to its former glory. I don't know when he is going to do it or how he is going to do it, but I'll bet you any money it has a lot to do with your prayers for us. Specifically prayers of reparation. We priests are called upon to make reparation for our sins and the sins of our brothers, and so I think it would be a good idea for you to do the same. Again, on the third Tuesday, we offer a devotion of reparation after Mass.

I pray that the Lord anoints these words of mine, to make them persuasive words to encourage you to come on that night, to "stand in the breach", as it were, between heaven and earth, in the same way Moses did, pleading that he be merciful to our world, which is so much in need of Mercy right now.

Lastly, I would like to offer a quote from Pope St. John Paul II. His feast day was on Friday. I will allow him to make the final point, but it's a point I make all the time. I quote:
"He who was born of the Virgin Mary, the carpenter's Son, the Son of the living God came to make us all a kingdom of priests. The Second Vatican Council has reminded us of the mystery of this power and of the fact that Christ's mission—Priest, Prophet-Teacher, and King—continues in the Church. Everyone, the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission."

Fr. John