

Fr. John's Homily for July 2, 2023, 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

JMJ CHS

As I have told you many times, I am quite amazed at the generosity of the people here at Holy Spirit Church. You always come through regardless of what the cause might be. Sunday collections, the annual DSA, the *Witness to Hope* campaign, the ongoing appeals from our St. Vincent de Paul chapter, not to mention your response to particular spontaneous requests like my "chasuble collections" where I hold out my vestment and become a beggar on behalf of tornado, or hurricane and flood victims or whatever the case may be. And we have individual benefactors who do all kinds of things for our parish. This comes under the general heading of stewardship – the sharing of one's time, talent, and treasure.

But sometimes it is a special type of gift that is given to me personally. I am often overwhelmed by the kindnesses that you have shown me in so many different ways. And I sometimes wonder.... about the source of it all. Where does this come from?

Well, on the one hand, it could be just good, old-fashioned kindness. There are some very nice people in this world and for them, it seems to come naturally. But on the other hand, in some cases, I would say it is a grace from God; a gift of the Holy Spirit, as it were. We could call it the charism of...hospitality. A magnanimous spirit, kindness, generosity, and graciousness, all rolled into one. But there is yet another possibility. As Christians we read the Bible and so in faith and obedience we allow ourselves to be influenced by what we read. And so, if the scriptures give us examples of generosity we should see ourselves as called to imitate them.

Today's readings give some examples. The gracious lady in the first reading is elderly and she and her husband have no children. She meets Elisha, the prophet, and recognizes him as a holy man of God. She consults with her husband and they agree to provide an apartment for him in their home, up on the roof, where he can stay from time to time when he passes through the neighborhood. A bed, a chair, a small table with a lamp, Internet access... This could be the origins of the bed-and-breakfast. And we could see this as an Old Testament version of *The Bethany Home*, that town near Jerusalem where Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus lived. They were friends of Jesus and He could stop by there and enjoy some peace and quiet, a glass of wine and some fellowship. It was kind of a B&B for Him and most priests can claim at least one Bethany Home from among their parishioners.

And then, finally, we have the Gospel where Jesus seems to refer to that earlier story from the Book of Kings about assisting a prophet, or even a lowly disciple. He brings it down to simply offering a cup of water to one of God's little ones. Here Jesus assures us that the giver will then be the receiver. They will not lose their reward. So then, maybe this, too, is an incentive for generosity, the hope of a reward. And there is nothing wrong with that. Peter even asked a question "Lord, what's in it for us?" The reward for the lady in the first story was that she would no longer be barren and would have a child in her old age. And the reproach she suffered at the hands of the culture for all those years would finally... be over. And as for Martha and Mary, their brother Lazarus was raised from the dead. Not a bad reward for their generosity. So I guess the point is that your kindness to your priests is seen by your Heavenly Father and He, in turn, will reward you. I hope that doesn't sound too self-serving, but I truly wouldn't want you to lose your reward.

Now there are some other parts of the Gospel that present us with some interesting challenges. Some of it might be attributed to hyperbole, a kind of exaggerated way of speaking with the purpose of making an important point. I am talking about “hating of mother and father,” or “hating of son and daughter,” or “of taking up the cross,” or of not being worthy of being a disciple of Jesus. Pretty strong words. So a little discernment is called for.

First off, we are all called to be disciples. But we can do it in many different ways. You can be disciples within the context of your own families and at the opposite end of the spectrum, a disciple could live as a hermit out in the desert with no human contact whatsoever. Well, maybe the key to all of this is indeed, obedience. One of the things Jesus said to His disciples was, “*You did not choose me, I have chosen you, to go and bear fruit.*” Therefore, we are called.... to obey our call. That happens in different ways. Some are “chosen” for the married life. Some are “chosen” for the single life. You were just reminded that you are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.*

But some are chosen in a special way for religious life and even within that context there are many categories ... parish priests, religious order priests, brothers or nuns, or deacons. Some who are in very active roles, others in contemplative roles living silent lives behind the walls of a monastery or convent. And as far as I know, there are none of you here today that fit into that category. Even I don't. My rectory is not a monastery. I am a secular diocesan priest and I take vows of chastity and obedience, but not poverty. And I will be the first to admit it, I think I have too much stuff. Yet I still believe that we priests are called to lead a more austere life, at least *somewhat* monastic, in imitation of Jesus and His first chosen disciples.

Another point from today's Gospel is presented in different ways. “He who hears you, hears Me”. “He who receives you, receives Me”. And of course, the all important addenda..... “and he who receives Me, receives the One ... who sent Me. Can you imagine Jesus pointing upward, to heaven, to his Heavenly Father, when he first preached these words? The example is quite simple yet makes an important point for you here, but also beyond you, to the whole world. How so? At His Ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples to “Go, baptize all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” And that's quite a lot of stuff. And we are all called upon to obey . . . that stuff.

But at the Last Supper, He said that He had not told them everything, and that He would send the Holy Spirit who would lead them to all truth. And by that we mean that the Church has been given the authority to teach, as the Holy Spirit guides it. God the Father is speaking through his Son to the disciples, out into the pews and finally out into the world.

And so we have examples of the Church proclaiming things that are not in the Bible. Things like the Trinity, Purgatory and teachings about Mary such as declaring her *Theotokos*, that is, *Mother of God*. And proclaiming her perpetual virginity, and the Catholic doctrine of her Immaculate Conception or her Assumption into Heaven. Yes, all Catholics are commanded to believe and obey, and share these things ... as truth. And yes, the world is invited to believe them as well. The truth is for everyone! And you have your part to play.

But now, we have an elephant in the living room. The successors of the original 12 apostles, that is, the current leadership of the church, is being criticized. And yes, that includes the successor of Peter, himself. Prayers for the pope and his bishops have been around for a long time and those prayers speak very highly of their status as representatives of God on earth. And yet we look at them and find cause for concern. It is now hard to actually pray those prayers.

So, what are we to think? What are we to do? A lot of people are weighing in on how we should answer these questions. Everybody has an opinion. One of you shared one of those internet opinions with me by way of email this past week. It's from a blogger in Ireland. I kind of like what he had to say so I had it posted under the MEDIA heading on our parish website.

But, hey, why shouldn't I weigh in, too. I have my opinions. And it's my opinion that we, the Church, that is, the Body of Christ, a chosen race, a priestly people, a holy nation, living stones, we too are enduring the same thing that He endured. And He, too, was betrayed, arrested, abandoned and denied by His closest friends. He was accused by the religious leaders and convicted and executed. He died. But He rose again and He lives forever and ever. Is the same thing happening to us? We, the Mystical Body of Christ. Are we approaching Calvary? There are some days where it feels like we are already there, hanging on the cross. But is there more to come? Much more?

Our task here at Holy Spirit Church, is to be obedient to the will of the Father, and to take up our cross, so that each of us might be deemed worthy to be called His little ones, disciples of Jesus. So as to not lose our reward.

~Fr. John