

28th Sunday Ordinary Time

October 11, 2009

Our gospel today was about the rich young man, and although this would be a good opportunity to give a money talk, I'm not prepared to give one this week, so you can put your wallets away (for now). I really want to explain to you this picture of St. Boniface, which was a recent gift to us. But before I talk about St. Boniface I have an amusing story to tell you. St. Bernard's Church in Winton Place caught on fire recently (that's not the amusing part). It was due to out dated electric and Fr. Shappelle told me there was about \$50,000 damage. What is amusing is that Fr. Shappelle credits me with saving the church from burning down entirely. Here's how it happened. He had a funeral coming up around 6:00 pm and went over to church about 2:00 to get things ready. While there in church, he decided to sit down and read my homily book – and he fell asleep. He woke up a short time later coughing on the smoke coming from the fire that had started while he was sleeping. If it weren't for my book putting him to sleep, he would have gone back to the rectory and the fire would have been much worse. I'm glad to know my homilies are so helpful.

Now the picture of St. Boniface. I am often asked why we don't have a picture of St. Boniface here. I always point out our stained glass window of him, and I tell people there is a statue of St. Boniface above the front doors of the church. Recently I spoke with Len Buckley, an artist in Maryland, about a picture and he volunteered to paint one. (I introduced Len and his wife Janet at Mass last Saturday). Janet is a graduate of St. Boniface and a cousin of Fran Klosterman. That is his connection with St. Boniface. His name is not famous but you come in contact with his art work many times during the week. Every time you handle a piece of US currency that has an oval around the president's picture on the front of the bill, the art work on the front and back of the bill is the work of Len Buckley. (The newer bills do not have the president's picture in an oval – in case you hadn't noticed). Len also competed with 100 other artists to design the back of the Colorado quarter and his design won the competition. So much about the artist.

Now the picture. St. Boniface has a red cloak, not only because he was a bishop, but also because he was a martyr. His miter also indicates he was a bishop. Like the man in today's gospel Boniface, gave up everything to follow Christ. He was not any more German than St. Patrick was Irish. St. Boniface was an English Benedictine monk who could have had a very comfortable life as the abbot of a monastery in England, but he felt called to travel to Germany to work for the conversion of Germanic tribes and to reform the German Church. He had his work cut out for him. When he arrived in Germany in 719 (at the age of 47), paganism was a way of life. Whatever Christianity he found had lapsed into paganism or was mixed with error. The clergy he found were uneducated and lax and ignored the pope and their bishops. Boniface was very successful in his work. Four years after arriving in Germany, he challenged the pagan priests by cutting down an oak tree that was considered sacred to the pagan god, Thor. That is the subject of our stained glass window. The people standing around holding their hands above their heads would have been pagans waiting for Thor to strike him dead, but nothing happened. This led to a lot of conversions. St. Boniface built a chapel from the wood of the tree. In our painting, at the lower right hand corner is the stump of a tree representing the tree he cut down.

Next to it is the beginning of an evergreen tree representing the new growth of the Church in Germany. Behind his head we see the dark clouds of paganism begin to blow away as Boniface raises his right hand to bless us and his left hand points to the Scriptures, the Word of God. A dagger is set in the stump to represent the instrument of St. Boniface's martyrdom. In 754, at approximately 82 years of age, St. Boniface and 53 companions were massacred as they traveled into Friesland in northern Holland to confer Confirmation. One version of his martyrdom was that the pagans who killed him thought the boxes he carried with him contained gold, but they found only the archbishop's books and relics. I haven't decided yet where I am going to hang this picture, but I have it here today so I can talk about it. The artist dedicated his painting to Fr. Robert Brungs, a Jesuit who said his first solemn Mass here at St. Boniface in June, 1964.

I can't finish my talk about St. Boniface without a special mention of two other saints: St. Damien of Molokai who cared for the lepers in Hawaii until he died of leprosy at age 49 and St. Jeanne Jugan who started the Little Sisters of the Poor. The Sisters do a wonderful job – I know because my stepmother was there until she died. Ted and Roselyn are in the care of the Little Sisters at their home on Riddle Road. I mention Damien and Jeanne Jugan because they have been canonized today by Pope Benedict. I thought you should know this.

A lot of us here would probably never have heard of Christ, had it not been for courageous and dedicated missionaries like St. Boniface or St. Patrick. We could celebrate the faith that came to us through St. Boniface by going out to a beer garden on his feast, June 5, like the Irish do on March 17. Or we can show our gratitude and support for our faith by helping support missionaries in the world today. We will have the opportunity to do that through our Mission Sunday Collection next week. Another way we give thanks to God for our faith (and for all God's blessings) is through our weekly celebration of the Eucharist, as we do now, for as we all know the word "Eucharist" means "Thanksgiving".

29th Sunday Ordinary Time

October 18, 2009

INTRODUCTION: (Isaiah 53,10-11; Heb 4,14-16; Mk 10,35-45)

There are four unique passages in the Book of Isaiah the Prophet that are referred to as the Servant Songs. They were written over 500 years before Christ, and they tell us about some mysterious person or persons, referred to in the verses simply as God's "servant," whose faithfulness and suffering would bring redemption to many people. Each of these passages describe with amazing accuracy the redemptive work of Jesus who would not be born for another 500 years. We read all four Servant Songs during Holy Week. Just a month ago we heard part of one of the servant songs. Today part of the fourth one is read because it corresponds with Jesus' statement in today's gospel that he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

HOMILY

If you look in St. Mark's gospel, right before today's passage, Jesus had warned his apostles for the third time about his suffering, death and resurrection that was soon to take place. Now, for the third time, we are told by Mark how the apostles hadn't the slightest idea of what he was talking about. The first time Jesus warned them, Peter told Jesus that what Jesus was talking about (suffering and death) just couldn't happen. After the second time the apostles were arguing over which of them was the most important. Now, after Jesus' third prediction, James and John, two who were among his first followers, the only two who along with Peter had witnessed the raising of the daughter of Jairus back to life, the only two who along with Peter had witnessed the Transfiguration, these two now want to be placed ahead of all the others when Jesus comes into his kingdom. We can't fault them. Aren't we often just as oblivious as they were of what God is doing in our lives? Aren't we at times just as bold as they, coming to God and telling him: "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Jesus, in a kindly way, answers them: "What is it you want me to do for you." And patiently he explains what their request would involve (drinking the cup of suffering he would have to drink) and that it was up to their Heavenly Father to give them what they wanted.

He also took the occasion to teach all of them once more a lesson on how to really become great and important, not by being self-serving, but by serving others just as Jesus came to do.

Being a servant does not mean allowing people to walk all over us. Jesus was not afraid to stand up for himself. A policeman who didn't stop bad guys wouldn't be serving anyone. A parent who always let their child have his own way would be a poor parent and would be doing a disservice to their child. A teacher who would let a student get by with cheating or not doing their work would be a poor servant as well as a poor teacher. In other words, being a servant to others does not always gain us popularity. Jesus knew he was making a lot of enemies by the work he was doing, healing, teaching and attacking the evil spirits. He was, nonetheless, ready to lay down his life in order to serve others, even when people ignored him, misunderstood him, didn't appreciate what he was doing or hated him for it

Why would he do all of that? There was no other reason except love. I'm using the word "love" not to refer to an emotional or sentimental feeling necessarily but as a desire to do what one can do to help others. It's the same kind of love Jesus asks of us: "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you." At the Last Supper Jesus did something to demonstrate to his apostles a lesson he had spent his entire life trying to teach them. He washed the feet of each one of them. Peter, as I'm sure we all remember, objected to having his feet washed by Jesus. Peter felt it was so inappropriate for his master to kneel before him and do this dirty job that was generally done only by slaves. After Jesus had finished he told them: "I have given you an example to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

This world is made up of givers and takers. You see this in business, in social and family relations. I see it a lot in the Church. As Christians we are called to be givers. Some years ago I attended to a man who was dying of cancer. He dealt with his suffering with a great deal of peace. He told me one of the things that gave him peace was that in life he always tried to give

more than he had taken.

We ask the Lord to help us follow his example of love as we celebrate now the love of One who gave his life as a ransom for all of us.

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

October 25, 2009

Today we hear about a blind beggar who could actually see who Jesus is more clearly than the disciples and crowd who had been with him all along. It has been my objective every week to lead all of us to a fuller vision of who Jesus is and what he taught. I say "all of us" because I assure you I benefit as much or more than anyone else being able to reflect on the Scripture readings and trying to make them more understandable.

I have always believed that if I try to bring my parishioners to a deeper union with Christ, I will not have to worry about having enough money to run the parish. Ever since I became a pastor 32 years ago in Loveland, that has always been the case. But I would have only myself to blame if I start to worry and lose sleep over our finances without informing our parishioners that we need more support than we are currently receiving. Besides, this is part of my job to let you know how we are doing financially. This topic is just as basic as trying to bring people to a closer union with Christ, because if we're not able to stand on our own financially, the Archbishop will have to say it's time to close the doors for good. The Archdiocese simply does not have the funds to keep parishes open who are unable to keep themselves open. Our situation is not that desperate yet, but I need to tell people where we are before it gets desperate. Everyone I know has felt the effects of the downturn in the economy. Some of our parishioners have lost their jobs, some have been cut back, and some have not received a raise or if they did, it wasn't much of one. Every year for the past several years, around Christmas time, I have reminded people to continue to be generous and our people have been. Evidence of the generosity and commitment of our parishioners is that for the past five years I have not had to give a talk on money. As a matter of fact, in the last 18 years I have been here, there's only been one year, other than this year, that we've come out in the red. I think that was maybe ten or fifteen years ago and we came out about \$5000 in the red. This past fiscal year if we had come out \$5000 in the red, I would have had a party. Actually this past fiscal year we were down \$59,000. Now I'm not going to ask you to try to make up the \$59,000 we lost. We'll just hope maybe we'll get some generous bequests in years to come to help build our savings back up to where they were. I bring this topic before you because I don't want it to happen again this year. It could happen, however, if things don't move in a different direction.

Since July 1, the start of this fiscal year, we are down about \$6000. We looked to find where we could reduce expenses, and we did reduce our staff by a half-time person. Another thing we did was decide we would probably not be able to help the school to the extent as we have in the

past. I would like to say something about the school for a moment. The school is our ministry to the poor. 90% of our school families live below the poverty line and I am proud to say we are giving them a good education to help them succeed better in this world and, hopefully, to help them spiritually to find happiness in the next. We receive considerable help to run the school from State of Ohio vouchers and from our Catholic Inner City School Endeavor (CISE). Both of these sources of income have cut back the amount of help they give us. So the school will have to dip into its reserve just as the parish has had to do. Fortunately, we have some reserves because a parishioner left a nice bequest to the school a couple of years ago, but it will be gone in a couple of years if things don't get better.

Returning to the topic of parish finances: the simple fact is that our expenses have gone up and our collections have gone down. Bequests and special gifts have also gone down considerably. I'm not going to bore you with all the details of our finance statement. In a week or two we will be sending out a detailed financial statement for the past fiscal year. I have said this before, but perhaps I should say it again that the cost for the Church windows is coming out of our reserve. This was decided a couple of years ago when we realized it had to be done. So the cost of the windows is not the reason we've come out in the red this year.

I am going to ask for help in three ways. 1) As I look at our finances I believe we will come out okay this fiscal year if everyone raises their contribution by 10%. I know not everyone can, but if you can't, could you help us out a little bit more than what you give at present. I know you will be blessed and I bet you won't miss anything extra that you give. Remember, God will not let anyone get ahead of him in being generous. 2) I would ask if you would be willing to do direct deposit; that would be especially appreciated because that way you would be giving to the parish even if you are unable to come. 3) I ask our parishioners to remember us in their will. That has been a big help to us over the years.

Before I conclude I want to offer just a couple of brief thoughts. Let us consider the value of one dollar. Some people still tell themselves a dollar a week was good enough for my grandfather, so it's good enough for me. In some cases I know it's all a person can afford. But I want to remind people, in case they haven't noticed, the dollar is worth only a tiny fraction of what it was worth in grandfather's time. It has slipped considerably in value in just the past few years. I have decided to give back half of my salary before the end of the year. I'm not saying this for praise or pity, but simple to assure you that if I ask you to sacrifice, I am willing to also.

We need your help so that we can continue to serve you. Remember the pastor who told his parishioners: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we have all the money we need. The bad news is, it's in your pockets." Amen.