

Homily

November 5, 2023

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

21:45 – 37:00

The greatest among you must be a servant. That is one of the more powerful lines in all the Gospels. The greatest among you must be a servant.

That's the problem in both the First Reading and the Gospel. The priests and the people in the First Reading from Malachi, they had forgotten that they were there to serve – the priests – to serve the Covenant. And they were leading the people astray by not doing it. So the people were picking up that whole idea. "Well, if they're not going to do it, we don't have to do it.

And Jesus, in this – the fourth week – speaks of Scribes and Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians – you name it. This concludes this confrontation. He says they have authority to teach. But don't follow their example.

That's pretty damning, don't you think?

They had forgotten, that first and foremost, they were servants of God. Servants of the Covenant. And leaders of the people towards God.

This always makes me just a little nervous when this Gospel comes around. It does cause me to kind of reflect. Where would I fall, if at all?

This weekend, throughout the United States, we're focusing on Vocations. This whole month of November is, in part, a Vocations Month. It's also the month when we remember our dead, as you see on the banners. Those who we buried from the parish this last year.

But I want to focus on Vocations. Now when you hear the word, "**vocation**," I think you know it means **a calling**. And callings require listening. And the listening is to lead to choosing and action in life.

Yes. There are two sacramental callings within the Church called, "the sacraments of life in the Church." **Orders** (gesturing toward Deacon Tom) Deacon, Priest. (I couldn't get the Bishop to come. He was busy.) And **Marriage**. Those are two vocations within the Church that are based in service for

everyone. Yes, married people. You are there to serve not only your families, but everyone by your example and how you live it.

They're very important. And today it would be remiss of me not to say that priestly vocations right now are terribly important. We don't have enough in most places in the world, but especially in the United States, right now. So, Thus, the focus.

And marriage is absolutely important to who we are as a people. It's from marriage that we all emerge into this life and are nurtured.

But there is also in the Church consecrated and religious life. It's not sacrament, per se. But it is a total dedication to a calling from God to serve as a woman or man in religious life. They dedicate themselves to some charism. Whether it's teaching, or nursing, or orphans or you-name-it. It's amazing. Some are just prayerful, like the Carmelites over in Terre Haute. They spend their time praying for all of us.

But you know, Vocations in the Church don't stop there. Oh. All of those emerge from somewhere. Yes? And how did they grasp that? How did they hear that calling and walk into it?

Did you all know that you have a vocation in the Church? You know where it started? My baptism. Your baptism. Your baptism! You know, at baptism, especially of infants, we say when we anoint them with Chrism, "We anoint you as priest, prophet and king" – Royal! We're sent on mission. And Confirmation reaffirms that. And the Eucharist binds us to that and nurtures it.

Now we tend to think that there are two types of vocations for us. For the lay folks, right? There's your professional vocation and the secular vocation. And then, there's the religious vocation, rooted in our baptism. Which comes first? Not chronologically. Which comes first in how we see the world and how we live out our profession or our secular profession?

I hope it's our baptism and the commitment we have made in that to live out the Covenant. To nurture it in each other, to participate in it, as in this case, the parish family. As we do in the East Deanery, the Archdiocese – on and on – or in Bethlehem.

You know, Archbishop Daniel Polarchic, the deceased Archbishop of Cincinnati, wrote a wonderful commentary on the First Readings of Sundays and Holy Days. And this week's commentary that he wrote for this Sunday, ends with the line, "Faith is a family enterprise." Faith is a family enterprise. It starts in the nuclear family, parish family – on and on.

It's ours to do together. But it's not just here. Let's go back to those professions that you have. Beverly! (I will pay dearly for even calling out her name. But that's okay. I'm willing to suffer.) Beverly, what was your profession? I know you're retired, more-or-less. But what was your profession? Office Manager. Have you thought about how that connects to your calling in baptism? Yeah.

Jeff. (Yeah. It took me a moment. You saw the wheels turning as I'm going, trying to pull the name forward. It happens too often.) Profession? I-T, Information Technology. How's that tied to the Gospel? Living out the Covenant? "I've helped with some different technology in church." Okay. You've helped with that at church, but when you were doing this technology as your profession, who were your serving? People. Your customers. Okay. Is that part of the Gospel? How you treat them is.

Bill. You were a Cemetery Manager. You were an assistant and you ran the place and, etc. Right? Tied to the Gospel and your life in Christ. You want to say a little bit more than, "yes." Your name's not Cole, okay? Bill: "I waited on families who had lost someone dear to their family. And I still try to do that. " Yes. I know. He waits on families who have lost someone. To attend to those needs, especially if they've never had that experience. To do it with kindness and hard listening and watching.

Michael. What did you retire from? Indianapolis Police Department. (She [Beverly] just said, "Oh!") (laughter) How is that tied to the Gospel? Helping others. Keeping them safe. Helping them feel that their lives will not be in chaos and protecting. And sometimes that's really difficult to make the connection, isn't it?

Carissa. (I've got to even it out – men and women, okay?) You're a teacher. Where? Central Catholic? Gospel ties. "Every day." It's kind of obvious, isn't it? Your very presence there is teaching not only the subject, but how to live the faith. But even still, those students can drive you crazy right? Then it comes. "God give me patience."

I would encourage all of us, my brothers and sisters, to reflect this week on our profession – in the secular setting. What it was, or what it is. And to ask ourselves after reflecting on that, how does that fit into living out the Gospel? And if we find places where it's kind of rocky, perhaps it's time to reflect a little more and try to make a conversion.

That's for you to do, but I want to make one final connection. If we are praying for vocations to priesthood, to marriage, to religious life – men and women. -- where do they come from? They come from our midst. And when they see us connecting Gospel with daily life, they are therefore nourished to listen to the call and therefore come forward. To say, "I want to discern this. Perhaps, that's where I

belong in life.” Perhaps not. But at least they will approach that call because they see the faithfulness of life connected to the Covenant we have in Christ. Can you do that? That wasn’t rhetorical. Pray about it.