

November 7, 2021 9:30 a.m. St. Edward, Mendon

Parish Jubilee Visit/32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Comments at Beginning of Mass:

I'm so grateful to Msgr. Tom for inviting me to be here with you as I continue my Parish Visits throughout the Diocese in this, our Golden Jubilee Year. While my Visit is to celebrate with the People of both of these wonderful parishes here in the Collaborative of St. Martin of Tours and St. Edward, I'm particularly pleased to celebrate here at St. Edward's because I haven't had the opportunity to be here for quite a while, and the restrictions as a result of the worldwide Pandemic kept all of us from our normal schedules and routines for quite a while.

We celebrate this, the 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time today, in the midst of this Golden Jubilee Year, but also as I have proclaimed these 9 months, from the Feast Day of St. Augustine, our Diocesan Patron, on August 29th until the next Pentecost on June 5, 2022, as a "Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit"----a time for special prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our Diocese, for our Parishes, and for each of us---to help us to be revitalized in our Faith, and to be inspired as to where the Holy Spirit is guiding us into the future, and what the Holy Spirit might be asking of each of us. And as you know, during this time, more than likely, the Holy Father will appoint my Successor, to be our Fifth Bishop---and we pray for the Holy Spirit's particularly good selection in that important matter for all of us.

St. Edward Parish has been a strong "presence" of our Catholic Faith for the better part of 200 years, dating back to the 1830's; and the first church was established in 1872. St. Edward Parish "gave spiritual birth" to many other churches, including those in Vicksburg, Sturgis and Three Rivers. And this grand, and beautiful edifice, made with the materials of this area, and built by the sweat and loving human labor of its members, dates back to the early 1900's.

This community has been Shepherded by 30 outstanding and dedicated Pastors; and over Msgr. Martin's 42 years of priestly ministry, he has served as two of those 30 pastors---the first time from 1996-2004; and now again since 2016.

And so, for all these reasons, I'm very pleased to be here with you this morning on this 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time to celebrate our Faith together, praying that the Holy Spirit will fill us with His Gifts, and help our spiritual lives to bear the Fruits of His Love/Charity. Therefore, let us prepare....

Homily:

We heard a lot in today's Readings about Poor Widows, which is really a redundancy. In Biblical Days, it was almost a foregone conclusion that a widow would be poor, because when a woman's husband died, she not only lost her spouse, but she lost the normal means of any kind of income. And there were no supplemental societal programs to provide, except the dictates of the Mosaic Law.

We also heard a lot in today's Readings about Money. The Widow of Zarephath had none; the Widow in the Temple had very little; and others who came to that same Temple were very wealthy. Jesus watched all the people putting in their donations, and St. Luke makes the comment: "*many rich people put in large sums*". Jesus condemned the Scribes who were stealing money from the Temple Treasury, from the wealthy and even the couple pennies given by this destitute Widow.

So, we could very well think that the point of today's Readings might be to "care for widows and orphans" or "to be less concerned about money". But I think today's Readings are telling us much more than that. I think God's Word today is calling us to reflect on Charity.

Charity is always one of the signs of a vibrant and strong Faith. If we profess belief in God, and value our basic responsibility to Love God first and foremost, but right after that, to Love our Neighbor as we love ourselves---which is precisely what we heard about in last Sunday's Readings---but don't actually do anything to put our Faith into action in our lives, and/or fail to love God/neighbor---then our Faith is lifeless, empty and holds no value. Each of today's Readings challenge us to reflect on Charity. But we first of all need to make sure we have a clear definition of "Charity".

Some people have a somewhat trite attitude to being charitable---Yesterday I was at Fresh Thyme Market, and I was asked if I wanted to "round up for the Local Food Bank----I said "Yes"---it amounted to 9 cents! Hmmm....that didn't feel very "charitable". Some people might define "charity" as giving a dollar or two to someone in need, or to occasionally send in a donation to a local charity or two. I think "charity" is more than that.

Jesus was somewhat critical of the big wealthy donors putting their money in the Temple Treasury because, in His words, "*they contributed from their surplus*

wealth". To give money to the poor out of our surplus funds is kind and generous; but it's not Charity.

To give money, clothes, food, time, ourselves in acts of kindness, not because we don't need that money, those clothes, that food; but rather we give of ourselves because another needs it. To give *not just because we have more than we need*, but because we see *someone else who is in great need*. Scriptural Charity is radical in nature----it's about sacrifice----it's about generosity---it's about "giving until it hurts".

That's what we saw going on in today's First Reading. The Widow of Zarephath, who by the way was a non-Jewish person, and therefore considered a non-believer, was in the process of preparing the final meal for her and her little son, in the midst of an unending famine the land had been experiencing for 3 years. She had a tiny bit of flour left in her jar and a few drops of cooking oil left in the jug, which she intended to use to cook what she knew would be her last meal, and then, they would starve to death. Elijah boldly asks her to use that to prepare him a meal first.....and she does!!! That's when the Prophet of God miraculously rewarded the Widow who was able to sustain herself, her son, and Elijah for the foreseeable future.

The Widow in the Gospel is similarly "heroic" in her generosity; she could have kept those two pennies for herself---God would certainly have understood; OR she could have given God only one of those pennies and kept the other for her own needs. But she gave them both; Jesus tells us: *"She gave from her poverty; she contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."*

Both of those are examples of Radical Charity. But neither of those examples are equal to what we heard in today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, when we are reminded that what Jesus, the Son of God, did for us----through the ultimate Act of Charity---by coming into our world, taking on our human nature and living our human life so that He can show us how to live our lives with Charity/Love---and then submitting Himself to the suffering and ignominy of the Way of the Cross, His gruesome Crucifixion and Death, and Burial, and then 3 days later, being raised in Glory, destroying in the process the unending power of Sin and Death forever. Jesus did that once for all to save us from eternal damnation, and has offered us eternal Salvation.

So, following upon last Sunday's reminder of the basic and essential Commandments of Loving God and Neighbor, today's Readings challenge us on HOW we Love God, and HOW we love our neighbor. And it's not to give of our surplus wealth; it's to give from all that we have to live on---it's to give generously---it's to give sacrificially---it's to give like Jesus gives. And of course, when I'm saying "give", I'm not necessarily talking about "money"; I am talking about "giving" whatever the person we encounter "needs" from us. So today is a good day to exam our consciences, and to review our lives. I'll bet that every one of us are already doing that to many, many people in our lives.

Parents of course do that all the time----"24/7" as we say, your lives/time/privacy is not your own when you've got children. What's theirs is theirs, and what's yours is theirs, too, right? Parents rarely get good night's sleep, peaceful relaxing evenings, or probably never get to finish their own meals.

Spouses who are constantly, and probably unconsciously, always caring more about the needs of their spouse than of themselves; and if/when there's a sickness or other serious problem involved, you're always giving without even thinking about it.

Adult children who are taking care of an elderly parent or relative, plus all their other family responsibilities---they too are living examples of Charity.

And today in a particular way, I'm very mindful of my dear Mother on this the 23rd anniversary of her death, remembering that she constantly, in big and small ways, gave of herself right up to the point of death, when our Loving God received her into Eternal Life.

The lists go on and on. When we do those acts of love and kindness because of our Faith in God and motivated by the example Jesus gives us, that is Radical Charity for sure.

As I mentioned at the beginning of our Mass this morning, these are important times here in our Diocese, and I believe that our Loving God is presenting us with an amazing confluence of opportunities. We have just celebrated our 50th Anniversary as a Diocese; we are in the midst of the "Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit"; our Holy Father has called us, and every Diocese around the world, to a time of "Synodality", which simply means to stop and make ourselves aware of what it means for us to be a part of the Church, and to take additional time to "listen"; and finally, we are preparing for a time of transition in Leadership here in

our Diocese as we know that one day in the near future our Holy Father will appoint my Successor to become the Fifth Bishop of our Diocese. So each and every one of those “opportunities” are asking us to set our sights on the future, praying to be spiritually renewed and re-energized, so that we can be the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo that we need to be. Therefore we welcome these “graced moments” to help us, first of all, to listen to the Holy Spirit, prayerfully asking Him to guide us as a Diocese in the ways He wants us to go; and secondly to listen to one another---to really listen to others, not just talk at them, or post comments on Facebook, but to really listen to what those others in our lives are experiencing.

As I wrote to all of you in my new Pastoral Letter entitled ***Let Our Hearts be Inspired for Mission: A Pastoral Letter on the Holy Spirit***: “My hope for every Catholic in the Diocese of Kalamazoo...is that we will be re-energized as Spirit-filled evangelizers, individual members of our diocesan-wide community of missionary disciples, who are Eucharistically-centered and “on fire” with the Power of the Holy Spirit.”(p.21)

We need to **prayerfully listen** to the Holy Spirit’s direction; we need to **open our hearts** to receive the **Gifts** that the Holy Spirit so desperately wants to give us, being mindful that those Gifts will transform our lives, just as they transformed the Apostles’ lives and sent them fort on the Mission to change the world. And, when we receive those Gifts of the Holy Spirit, we need to **allow our lives to give evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit** in all that we say and do: to show the world, our Diocese, our Parish, and our families, the Love, Joy, Kindness, Peace, Patience, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-Control, and Chastity that are motivated by the Holy Spirit of God.

In other words, we need to Love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love our neighbor as Jesus loves us. We need to practice Radical Charity like the Widows in today’s Scriptures, but most of all in the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, Who not only gave His Body and shed His Blood on the Cross for our Salvation, but Who has given us His Body and Blood to be our spiritual Food and Drink so that we can have the strength we need for our Journey of Faith.

God bless you now and always!