

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds  
in order that people may see them;  
otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.  
When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you,  
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets  
to win the praise of others.  
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.  
But when you give alms,  
do not let your left hand know what your right is doing,  
so that your almsgiving may be secret.  
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,  
who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners  
so that others may see them.  
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.  
But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door,  
and pray to your Father in secret.  
And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

"When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.  
They neglect their appearance,  
so that they may appear to others to be fasting.  
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.  
But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,  
so that you may not appear to others to be fasting,  
except to your Father who is hidden.  
And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Homily: We Are Called to Live Generously

We've been working our way through the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, Ch 9, and in this section of the letter, Paul is exhorting the community to be generous to other parts of the Christian community that are going through economic hard times. We come to this section today where Paul is exhorting the Corinthian community to be generous in sharing from their material wealth (and Corinth was a wealthy city) to other parts of Macedonia that were economically in strife. We hear these famous words, "Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully. The Lord loves a cheerful giver."

We don't ordinarily take up collections at a weekday mass, but Rory would you get the basket here and let's just...[MIMES PASSING THE BASKET]. This is the occasion that reminds us of the importance of generous giving. Now in the providence of the readings, that reading is paired today with this section from Matthew Ch 6 where the Lord presumes that we're

fasting...presumes that were praying...presumes that were giving alms and that we're giving in generosity. The instruction that Jesus says is, "Don't do it to be seen by others." In all three instances: with the praying, with the fasting, with the alms giving, Jesus' exhortation is, "Don't let anybody know what you're doing."

That runs contrary to every fundraising principle of any capital campaign. The capital campaigns here at St. Anne's, the capital campaigns at Bellarmine, because why? We all like to be recognized for our giving. But Jesus says okay, it's a good thing to give but it's an even better thing to give and to not let anybody know what you're giving. That was very alive for our family after my mom died (and here I am violating the principle but I think many of you know this). So my family took a certain section of my mom's inheritance and gave it to the retreat house and we had this St. Joseph shrine given in honor of my mom and dad.

Bellarmino is finally getting around to plaques and so we said, "Okay, what kind of a plaque do we want to give to honor my mom and dad? We gave this [gift] and there was nothing there that was honoring them." And so we talked about it you know: "this size plaque and what the wording should be." But then one of my nephews, who isn't particularly religious, challenged us and he said, "Uncle Mike, why did you give the gift? [Did you do it] to let everybody know the Sparough family is really generous to Bellarmine and we're honoring our mom and dad? Or did you just give it so that people would have a chance to pray? Why do you need any plaque at all?" I turned to the guy and said, "You don't even go to church, just shut up and let us [decide], we're the ones that go to church! Now what size plaque do we want honoring our generosity?"

Well I just, you know, floated a series of emails to my brothers and sisters, and I mentioned just parenthetically, I said, "And by the way, one of the nephews said he doesn't think we should do anything at all." And that cut everybody to the quick and surprisingly they came back and they said, "I don't think we should do any plaque at all." The exception was the one that had already been given for from my dad which was 19 years ago. So that's what we decided. We didn't do anything.

Now as I say, I'm telling you this: See how generous we are? We don't even acknowledge our generosity, but I have to tell you this! But the point is that the readings today exhort us to generosity, and the generosity that is not given so that other people think we're generous but simply because we recognize how extraordinarily blessed we are. St. Ignatius Loyola said one of the worst sins we could get was a sin of ingratitude. What has become absolutely clear to me is the more we meditate on how God has gifted us, how God has blessed us, then the natural response is, we want to give back. We say, "Well Fr Michael I've worked hard for my money, you know? What about those other people? They're not working as hard. They're lazy. They're just sitting back." All it takes is one stroke, one heart attack, one car accident, one freak accident, and our good health, our intelligence, our ability to function well in this world, goes out the window.

Yesterday was the international Day of refugees (June 20, 2017). Do you realize there are 36 million refugees in the world today? These are people who have been forced [to flee] because of war, or violence, or fear of violence from the drug cartels, or they simply can't provide for their families. 36 million people who have been forced to flee their homes for safety or simply to be

able to survive. 36 million. And here we are, born into privileged society. Born into a country with a stable government where we can exercise freedom of religion; where we have an excellent school system; where we have the opportunity for healthcare. We take so many of those things for granted and yet, if God had ordained otherwise, we could have been born in another country and situation of violence. The opportunities that we take for granted where we just say, "I did this. I did this." Well, you did this and I did this because we had all of the pieces in front of us. And yes, we worked hard to assemble them (and some people don't work hard to assemble them), but how many people just don't have the opportunities that have been given to us?

St. Ignatius said one of the worst sins we can commit is a sin of ingratitude; just taking for granted that I deserve this. It is a spirit of entitlement.

This has been well documented: What strata of society gives the greatest percentage of their income? It's the poorest. As a percentage of their income, the poorest Americans give the largest percentage of their income. As a percentage of their income, who gives the least? It's the wealthiest sector of America. Now in terms of dollar amount, of course, it's the wealthy who give the largest amount. But as a percentage of their income, it's the poorest in the society, those who can afford the least are the most generous in our society. I'm not saying that to make you feel guilty, but I am saying it to cause us to meditate on what we take for granted and what we think we deserve. St. Paul says the Lord loves a cheerful giver and the Lord will never be outdone in generosity. Let's meditate on how much God has given us and that our response is, "Lord what can I give you in return?"

Amen. (Amen).