

February 19, 2018 – Matthew 25:31-46

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his followers who will go to heaven and who will not. I find it interesting that Jesus' condemnation was not for acts the people committed, but rather what they had not done. It is the sins of omission rather than commission about which Jesus speaks so strongly. It is the "coulda's, woulda's, shoulda's but didn'ts" that He found so damnable. And which I find so disconcerting, because as a committed and devout Catholic I don't do a lot of bad things, commit a lot of mortal sins but when I scrutinize my life carefully, I see times, many times, when I could have, would have, should have done more, or at least done something, but I didn't; from thoughtlessness, laziness, or apathy. And that, I think, is why Jesus spoke so strongly against sins of omission, they reflect spiritual pride, self-centeredness, and hardness of heart that flies completely in the face of all that Jesus taught.

It is easy to fall into the habit of thinking that government-sponsored programs will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick (and we are blessed to live in a country that cares about its sick and elderly and impoverished citizens), but government programs neither fill the spiritual hunger nor treat the spiritual malaise that afflicts so many in our world, our country, our community, our parish. As a committed and devout Catholic I am equally responsible for the spiritual needs of my neighbors as for their physical needs, and that is where I fail most often; passing by without looking, talking without listening, failing to see the emptiness in their eyes or hear the ache in their heart. I donate food and clothes and money and time to address the physical needs of others, but too often I fear, they leave my presence as spiritually deprived as when they entered.

During this Lenten Season I pray that I am more aware of the spiritual needs of those around me, and that I meet those needs in a way that is helpful, not hurtful. I pray that I shall be a small flame, not a blowtorch, because in the total darkness of a cave, the light from a single match shows the safe path to follow, but the light from a 100 Watt lamp causes a person to close their eyes and turn away.

Lynell Chamberlain

February 20, 2018 – Matthew 6:7-15

As a child, I loved the big family gatherings we had for Christmas and Thanksgiving, not just for the opportunity to run and play with cousins I only saw on these occasions, but also for the big feast that we had. As dinner approached we kids prowled through the kitchen and dining room looking at platters heaped with turkey and ham, bowls brimming with mashed potatoes containing rivulets of melted butter running down from the lake in the center, sweet potatoes, green beans with ham hocks, butter beans, corn, fresh homemade biscuits and rolls, and cornbread dressing with gravy; almost all grown, harvested, butchered, and made on our farm. Even the eggs and butter came from our chickens and milk cows. We stood there, nearly drooling with anticipation, and then one of our great uncles would be asked to say grace, and we inwardly groaned (I hope), because he notoriously prayed for what seemed like hours, thankful for every creature that had ever walked the earth, and asking God's blessing upon each creature individually. At least that's what it seemed like to a ten year-old child who thought she was verging on death from starvation.

I'm not critical of my great uncle's joy of prayer and his willingness to share it with us, but it did seem he felt the quality of his prayer was directly proportional to its length. Of course my memory is colored by a child's interpretation, but in today's Gospel, Jesus instructs his followers that God already knows our needs before we ask. Our prayer is not enlighten God about us, but to enlighten us about ourselves, to recognize that for which we should be thankful and that which we truly need. Prayer puts us into the proper frame of mind to listen to God as well as to talk to Him. Jesus provides us with the perfect prayer, the Our Father, which, when prayed thoughtfully, addresses all our real needs; to praise God, to seek his will, to fill our physical and spiritual needs, to forgive us and for us to forgive others, and to lead us.

During Lent this year, I will pray the Our Father slowly and thoughtfully, pausing at each section to deliberately apply it to my life, and particularly focus on forgiving others who have trespassed against me. As Brother Bob Baxter said when he spoke to us on November 8, 2017, "Our relationship with God is only as strong as our weakest relationship with each other"

Lynell Camberlain

February 21, 2018 – Luke 11:29-32

Mark Twain said, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” Jesus recognized that we do not appreciate the wisdom of someone we know well. All four Gospels attribute to Jesus comments about a prophet having no honor at home (Mt 3:57; Mk 6:4; Lk 4:24; Jn 4:44). We seem incapable of accepting that someone we know well, can be anything other than the everyday person we know.

In today’s Gospel, however, Jesus warns about failing to listen to those around us, those who know us and our situation, can give us objective advice. The Ninevites listened to Jonah, a man from another country and religion, and they believed. A queen from a faraway country and different religion listened to Solomon and believed. Yet the people of Judea failed to listen to someone of their same ethnic and religious background, even though he spoke the Truth, powerfully. He was “God-with-us”, yet they didn’t believe, and he warned they would be judged for it.

God often uses the least among us to deliver his message: an unmarried teenager in Galilee; an Aztec peasant in Guadalupe, Mexico; illiterate shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal. Do we today fail to heed words of wisdom because they come from someone we know too muchly well rather than an internationally renowned expert? Do we ignore God when he speaks through our spouse, a parent, a child, a friend? I pray that during this Lenten Season I recognize the voice of God, even when it comes from the mouth of someone I know well.

Lynell Chamberlain

February 22, 2018 – Matthew 16:13-19

Jesus had been preaching and teaching, healing and performing miracles throughout the Judean countryside. Rumors swirled about his “real” identity; could he be Elijah come back to earth or John the Baptist resurrected from the dead. Only Simon, son of Jonah, recognized the longed for Messiah foretold for so long, the second person outside of Jesus’ family to know his true identity. Because of his insight, Jesus made Simon the rock, Peter, on whom he built his Church.

Peter saw the same things as the other disciples, heard the same words as the other disciples, but he recognized the real presence of God in human flesh when no one else did. God’s revelation to Peter occurred because Peter searched earnestly for the Messiah, sought for him with his whole being. Oh Peter still made mistakes, screwed up after this flash of insight, he didn’t fully understand the Messiah that Jesus truly is. After all, everyone expected a Messiah who wrought military and political change, not the radical, personal transformation Jesus taught, but what makes Peter so powerful, is that with each failure he experienced, from being called Satan to cowardice in battle, he got up, sincerely begged forgiveness, and tried again. Peter was not a quitter.

Too often when I fail, I slink away berating myself and vowing never to try again. Satan wins not because of the sin I commit, but because I give up and quit, and for Satan, a win is a win. I have slowly grown to recognize that these failures and trials are the mechanism God uses to show me my weaknesses. If I use them as constructive criticism, with God’s help I can shore up the weak spots within me, after all he is an experienced carpenter.

During this Lenten Season I will strive to persevere when things are difficult, to not be a quitter. I wonder what God could accomplish through me, through our parish if we earnestly strive and persevere? Will people see the real presence of God in St. John Paul II parish?

February 23, 2018 – Matthew 5:20-26

Rene Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am”, but Jesus turns that notion around to say, “You are what you think”. In today’s Gospel, Jesus scolds the legalistic Pharisees and scribes for emphasizing the action of a person without addressing their internal mental environment. He clearly understands that actions are simply crystalline thought, that whatever we focus our mind on will sooner or later be acted upon. Jesus knew that if we scheme about revenge or plot murder or lust for someone “just for fun” that there is a good chance we will act on it. But even if we don’t physically carry out our fantasy, the thought of it weakens, and may rupture our relationship with others and with God.

In this digital age, we have at our fingertips virtually an endless supply of mind pollution; pornography, hateful propaganda against anyone or anything different from us in any way, or violence that shocks and then numbs the observer. All of these mental pollutants share the same characteristic; they turn a human being into an object, which we use for our pleasure or disdain and then discard. It destroys our empathy, our ability to feel what another feels. It destroys our ability to enter into a loving relationship with another person. It destroys our ability to enter into a loving relationship with God.

During this Season of Lent, I shall endeavor to cleanse the polluted areas within my mind and guard against the external factors that threaten to sully my relationship with God and his creation.