



Thirtieth Sunday Ordinary time -C- October 23, 2022

Annual Catholic Appeal -2- JESUS IS ALIVE!

Homily-Father Ed Hislop

Some years ago, about this time of the year—a bit closer to Thanksgiving—parishioners (in another parish) approached me and the Social Concerns team with a request: “Can you give us the names of some poor families, with young children, so that we can surprise them by placing a basket of food on their porch, late at night, so that they can find it in the morning.” “We do not want them to know who left it!” A laudable request, at first glance—an act of charity and generosity. When asked why they would like to do this, the answer was, as we hear so often from television and internet evangelists, “Giving to others in need always makes a person feel good about themselves, and it teaches our children to share.” Besides, as the discussion continued, “When people are generous to others, God is generous to them.” Interesting responses, a typical understanding about giving for the sake of others.

However, when asked about what these families would do when all the food anonymously left on their doorstep was consumed and gone, the response was less clear. Well, we cannot feed them every day. Another reasonable response that needs some further reflection.

Caring for those in need, hearing the cry of the oppressed the wail of the orphan or abused child or the weariness of the refugee and immigrant, is not only a matter of charity, nor is it only a matter of a basket of food or a kind word, now and then.

Giving, sharing, hearing, serving and hospitality is, for us, a matter of justice. The kind of justice of which Jesus speaks in another place: “*The poor,*” he says, “*you are to always have with you.*” In other words, be with them, listen, converse.

Do not just bring them food, invite them to dinner with you!

Conversation evokes change—in the hungry person and in the dinner host! Conversing more than charity, begets the justice of true care, hospitality, love, and presence.

St. Basil the Great spoke these haunting words when addressing the question of Charity versus Justice: “*When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor.*”

St. John Chrysostom, a great father of the Church, says it this way: “*Do you want to honor Christ's body (the body and blood of which you eat and drink)? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church [with your prayers] while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: This is my body, [this is my blood] and made it so by his words, also said: “You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers/my sisters, you did not do it for me.” (Mat 25:34ff) What we do here in the church requires a pure heart; what we do outside requires great dedication.*”

The two we met in today's Gospel are two vastly different people who see life from different perspectives. One, the Pharisee, from his view of privilege, his own secure life of plenty, a sense of self-righteousness and his own “entitlement.”

He was a good person—doing everything he was supposed to do, but he could not see beyond himself, his own community, opinion, and social standing—he was entitled, therefore, to be heard and to be respected.

The other, the one at the back of the temple—the tax collector—saw from the point of view of his own neediness, weakness, and sinfulness. He was not likely poor from a monetary perspective—he was a tax collector, but he was poor because he was not accepted, because he violated (as a tax collector) his own people—he was “outside, cold and naked,” something, according to the Pharisee, that he likely deserved or brought on himself. The Pharisee was convinced that this tax collecting sinner, whom he did not know and with whom he did not enter into any conversation, was not “entitled.”

Poverty comes in many forms, the cry of the oppressed is heard in many ways. It is much easier to leave a basket of food on the doorstep of someone perceived as hungry, without ever knowing them, than it is to listen to the anguish of those on the outside, the outer edge, especially if they are thought to have placed themselves there, as this tax collector seems, in the view of the Pharisee, to have done.

Those who gather around the Lord’s table, as we do, and converse here with God, do not give out of charity alone; We do not give, because we will not miss what we hand over. We give because we eat and drink of Christ, we give because we are convinced that everything we have is given to us by a merciful God for the sake of others.

We give, not only by anonymously leaving food on the doorstep of the hungry (as good as that may be), but by discerning ways to hear—to really hear the cry of the poor, the wail of the orphan

the complaint of the widow and the longing of the immigrant.

And in hearing, letting our eyes be opened, that “we may serve them truly, after the example of Christ and at his command....that all people may be raised up by the hope of a world made new.”

We give, not only out of charity or generosity, but because “it is right and just” that we do so! We give, not to receive “credit” or something in return but because we remember that God knows no favorites in the “race of life.”

We give like one who bends low to gently wash dirty and worn feet, only because they are dirty and worn! We give like a loaf of bread and a cup of wine, taken, blest, broken, poured out and given in memory of the one who hears the cry of the poor, the outcast, the wail of the orphan and the longing of the immigrant. We give...and we must be seen giving!

We give, as Paul reminds us today, “to be poured out like a libation.” Poured out by giving, listening, and trusting in God. We give because, as we heard sung in today’s Psalm: “The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; and those crushed in spirit he saves. The Lord redeems the lives of his servants.”

We give because we “walk by faith and not by sight.” We give because we are seen eating and drinking at this Table, and from here we are sent to be seen serving, caring, giving.

In the end the ANNUAL CATHOLIC APPEAL, and Parish Stewardship, is more about justice than it is about charity.

JESUS IS ALIVE!

