

Sharing (November 11, 2018)

Have you looked at the calendar lately? Our current liturgical year ends in two weeks. Our current liturgical year ends in two weeks with the Solemnity of Christ the King. And then Advent, and, before you know it, Christmas... It all goes by so very, very quickly, doesn't it?

We've been using the five-week run-up to the new liturgical year to talk about faithful discipleship, intentional discipleship, intentional discipleship lived through our praying, our serving, and our sharing... Last week, we talked about praying. This week, a word about sharing... And next week, a word about serving...

The question before us: "Does God want more? Does God want more from you and from me in terms of our praying, our serving, and our sharing? Last week, we discovered the answer in our Gospel reading from Mark. God wants it all, it seems. God wants "our hearts, our minds, our souls, and all of our strength." Yes, God wants all of us, but God is patient. God walks with us on our journeys of discipleship.

And so, today, a conversation about sharing... A conversation about sharing here at St. Mary's, yes, but a conversation about sharing beyond the walls of St. Mary's as well, a conversation about sharing in our families, in our community, and in the world beyond as well.

But first, two words, two words moral theologians talk about all the time. Two words: habit and virtue... In a sense, a virtue can be thought of as a kind of habit. A virtue can be thought of as a good habit. But some habits aren't virtues. Some habits aren't so very good. We call these habits vices. And some habits are just habits. I get up at 5:00 each morning. I drink four cups of coffee every day. And I stop at Dunkin Donuts more often than I care to admit. These are just habits, but they're not virtues.

A virtue is a habit that emerges over time through intentional living, intentional living oriented to something or someone that lies beyond our immediate wants and needs. From a Christian perspective, a virtue emerges over time by way of intentional living oriented to Jesus and to the community he gathers around him, the Church. As moral theologians put it, a habit is just a habit, but a virtue is our way of being in the world. For a Christian, a virtue emerges over time through intentional living as a disciple on the journey to God.

So, first, a conversation about sharing here at St. Mary's and, then, a thought or two about sharing in the world beyond the walls of St. Mary's. Two kinds of sharing, yes, but two kinds of sharing that invite the same question: habit or virtue? Is our sharing a matter of habit? Or is it a reflection of virtue? Is our sharing a matter of habit? Or is it a reflection of intentional living? A reflection of intentional discipleship?

First, St. Mary's... And I must note that this is something of a rarity here at St. Mary's. I've been a part of this wonderful community for over five years now; and this is the first time I've heard – let alone delivered – a homily about finances. There has been little need, in fact, because so many of you have been so very generous with your time, your talent, and your treasure over the course of so many years.

This week, you received a financial report from Father Pat and our Finance Council. I encourage you to read it. I encourage you to read it carefully. It tells a remarkable story, a remarkable story of ministry, a remarkable story of our praying, our serving, and our sharing. Nevertheless, two alarm bells are gently sounded in this year's report. First, despite St. Mary's ever-leaner budgets, it's an open question as to whether or not we'll be able to maintain – let alone expand as needed – the many services and ministries provided here at St. Mary's. And second, our sharing is uneven. Our sharing is unbalanced. St. Mary's is home to some 2,200 families. Seventy percent of us, however, contribute less than \$10 per week; and fewer than 60 of our more than 2,200 families account for half of our total collection over the course of any given year. Our sharing is uneven. Our sharing at St. Mary's is unbalanced.

And so our question: habit or virtue? Do we share out of habit? Or is our giving a reflection of our intentional discipleship? Let me be clear: this isn't a matter of the amount given *per se*. Our Gospel reading from Mark makes this clear. Jesus dismisses the giving of the "many rich people" he observes. He celebrates, instead, the "poor widow" who shares from the little she has. Jesus dismisses giving out of habit – whatever the amount contributed, small or large – and celebrates, instead, the intentional giving of the "poor widow." For the poor widow, sharing is her way of being in the world; it's part and parcel of her journey of discipleship. The poor widow is generous. She lives out of a grateful heart. The poor widow is virtuous in the truest sense of the word.

And so our first reflection question for the coming week: Is my sharing here at St. Mary's a matter of habit or a matter of virtue? Is my giving at St. Mary's a matter of habit or a reflection of intentional discipleship? Do I live out of a grateful heart?

And now a thought to two about our sharing beyond the walls of St. Mary's... I have come to know the people of St. Mary's to be very generous indeed. So much sharing, in fact... Some of you help support your grown children and your grandchildren. Others give generously to your parents and grandparents. And so many good and worthy causes: the NPH orphanage in Guatemala, Catholic Charities, United Way, walks to support cancer and other kinds of medical research, hurricane relief, assistance to friends who are struggling... The list goes on and on. So much giving... So much sharing...

The motive? Well, let's face it: motives – our reasons for giving – can be complex. One part, obligation, one part an emotional pull of one sort or another, and one part habit, perhaps... How then to purify our motives? How then to "sanctify" our motives? How then to incorporate our giving outside the walls of St. Mary's into our way of being in the world? How then to incorporate our sharing outside the walls of St. Mary's into our journeys of discipleship? How then to make our sharing virtuous?

Well, there is an answer. At the end of today's Mass, you'll be sent forth with the following words: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." You'll be challenged to take Jesus into the world. You'll be challenged to journey with Jesus beyond the walls of St. Mary's.

But here's the thing. It works both ways. When you come back to Church next Sunday, you will hopefully bring your world with you. When you come back to Church next Sunday, you will be invited to bring your world – your children, your grandchildren, your friends, and the many causes that pull at your heartstrings and your purse strings – into Church with you. To what end? In fact, to be gathered with the bread and wine in our offertory procession. We're invited to bring all we are to the altar: our hearts, our minds, our souls, and all of our strengths... And our children, our

grandchildren, our friends, and the many causes that pull at our heartstrings and our purse strings, too... This is how our giving outside the walls of St. Mary's is purified. This is how our sharing outside the walls of St. Mary's is "sanctified." This is how our way of being in the world becomes more than obligation, emotional response, or habit. This is how our way of being in the world – our way of being with others – becomes virtuous.

Intentional living... Intentional discipleship... And so two questions for the coming week.. Again, is my giving here at St. Mary's a matter of habit or is it intentional? Does my giving here at St. Mary's reflect habit or does it reflect virtue, my way of being in the world? And second, do I truly see the connection between my sharing outside of the walls of St. Mary's and my journey of discipleship? Do I bring all that I am – my heart, my mind, my soul, and all my strength – to the altar each week to be "sanctified" by the very presence of Jesus?

Again, we invite you to use the brochure provided for this five-week journey to record any commitments you may choose to make for the coming liturgical year. We'll collect them during the offertory two weeks from now when we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. Again, no names... No identifications as such... And no public sharing... Just the anonymous commitments of intentional disciples, intentional disciples on the journey to God.

Next week, a word about serving...