

Homily, Twenty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time “A”

SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral

September 10 - 11, 2011

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In the second reading, we heard none of us lives to ourselves nor do we die to ourselves but because of our baptism we all live for the Lord. It's a question of the environment in which we live. When we live for ourselves, we're just living for our preoccupation, our agenda, the way we look at things, the way we measure life, and so on. But when we live for the Lord that puts us in a whole different environment of being – we are living out of the Lord's standards, out of the Lord's sense of right and wrong and not out of ours.

Some years ago my grandmother, who during the depression, used to make bread two times a week in an old enamel wash pan for her family of eight children and in her later years she continued to make the bread but only on special occasions. This was quite a saga as she had to make sure grandpa had gone downstairs to stoke the coal furnace so that when she put the raising dough in the wash pan on the metal stool (which I have upstairs – not to make bread but it's upstairs) and put that on the metal stool over the register and the heat and all would work together. Years later she moved to another home and had an electric operation which she did not like. Fire is not real unless you can see it. The wash pan came along with us as did the metal stool and so on and so forth.

One Thanksgiving evening both my aunts decided none of us know how to make the bread. So one armed with pen and paper and the other as the inquisitor invited my grandmother to the kitchen table that Thanksgiving night and asked “Mother, how do you make the bread?” Of course she couldn't tell them but she did proceed to give them a great expose of the evils of electric cooking. Then there was an expose of how this got so complicated when they moved from down on Missouri Street to the East side and she couldn't find the wash pan because it was on the other side of Uncle Jack's car and things were getting very complicated and finally she moved to a final home – more evils of electric cooking. But my aunt said “What about the bread?” “I'm trying to tell you” and she went off about how Jack should park his car differently and etc, etc. Finally, she stood up and said

“Oh” and walked out of the kitchen – knowing in her mind that her part was complete. One aunt looked at the other. How much did you get? Not much –all I got is to just make sure grandpa who has gone to the Lord had to stoke the coal furnace. They now just that you have to run around Jack’s car three times – that is as far as they got. They wisely went to option B – watch her the next time she made the bread.

So now every time we have the bread (the Aunt makes the bread ) we tell the younger members of the family, the great grandchildren and all, who would not have known personally their great grandmother, but they do get to know her a little bit through the breaking and baking of the bread. She never measured anything of course. Many good cooks don’t. Some of this and some of that and it all seems to work out. There was a sense in her mind. That is what it means to live on to the Lord and not on to ourselves. We’re living out of a different sense of measurement. Which really isn’t any measuring at all. It’s an awareness. Something that we appropriate for ourselves over a life time for ourselves. Bit by bit. By God’s grace.

Today, in the parable of the kingdom, we have another experience of doing without measure. The king forgives the debtor. He hopes the king will simply be patient with him. Not only is he patient with him but much to our surprise he forgives him the whole thing. Now Jesus listeners would have been shocked. Because once again he is teaching them by virtue of what we call “the parable”. And one of the signs of the authentic parable teaching of Jesus is that he tells them and begins with a very familiar story. Oh, yes, this is the one about which the king forgave the debt. Oh yes we know that one, they’re following along, following along. Then all of a sudden – the sign of Jesus authenticity in teaching is – at the very end just when they are expecting the predictable outcome, he reaches in and completely reverses what happened. So first of all they’re surprised by the fact that the king forgave the whole thing and then they hear the part about the fellow servant was not forgiven, thrown in prison and harshly treated. And the king becomes furious. And responds in kind the second time.

There is no measuring here of the King’s beneficence. He forgave the whole debt! When we let go of our own ego - we’re not living in our own sense of narrow

mindedness. We forget the measuring stick or measuring cup. Because we are living unto the Lord and the Lord's mercy is measure-less.

Where we get caught is when we start trying to dole out measuring. A little bit like the first trip I made to Ireland many years ago – sitting in a very nice restaurant in a hotel and I ordered a Coca Cola. You get a coke at room temperature most of the time in Ireland. Accustomed as we are, even in the dead of winter of getting freezing drinks, I asked for some ice. The waitress looked at me as though I had just asked for a million dollars. She said “well, all right”. She was gone for a little while and came back with a lovely crystal bowl, a small pair of tongs, and a few precious cubes of ice. She stood next to my glass and she took one piece of ice and put it in there and then in her beneficence put in a second piece and stood and looked at me as though – surely you can't want more.

In our ego, we measure out our mercy. In our ego we let vengeance take the place of measureless forgiveness because we want to settle the account fairly and yet we have to make the distinction as always sacred scripture does between justice and vengeance. Vengeance is a question of my bruised and hurt ego. Forgiveness is living unto the Lord. The forgiveness we are invited to, not just offer to one another, but in which we are invited to live as we live unto the Lord today is without measure. That's challenging. We would rather, like the waitress, dole it out in small portions just to see if your going to respond properly or not.

Today, as we have our observance of the horrific event of September 11, we struggle with this gospel. There is a piece of us no doubt that these years later would like to dole out our compassion and forgiveness in those little ice cubes. Little frozen measured amounts of compassion and yet the thing that blew the minds of Jesus listeners was he threw the tongs, the bowl, the measuring stick – he threw it all away. And just as he does not measure with the little bit of bread and wine that we bring today but makes a measureless amount of his loving and forgiving presence of which we are the beneficiaries so to because we do not live unto ourselves but live unto him we are asked to ditch the measuring cup and to offer whatever forgiveness we can. As I say – a challenge, is it not? Something we cannot do by ourselves. Nor does the Lord expect us to. He helps us by his example, by his grace to be loving and forgiving of the small hurts as well as the monumental and horrific hurts.

Today we pray that we can no longer live into ourselves but cast aside the measuring cup and live unto the Lord.

Today, we pray that bit by bit as the Lord's mercy and compassion washes over us as surely as it washes over us on a shore that God's beneficence will create that environment in which all of us lives and allows us to be measureless in our loving forgiveness of one another and especially those who are our enemies.

Let that be our prayer today. And know that the Lord is patient with us as we make his forgiveness our own and make that forgiveness available to one another.