

March 2, 2014 – Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Lent

Are you ready for Wednesday?

Wednesday, March 5th.

Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent.

Lent is late this year, almost as late as it can get.

Because Lent is so late this year, today we are celebrating the 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Most of the time, we would be celebrating the 8th Sunday of Ordinary Time in the month of May.

The images of "birds of the air and lilies of the field" from today's Gospel would fit better in the warmth of May than here in the bitter cold of a snowy March.

Those stories of "the birds of the air and the lilies of the field" speak of how much our fatherly God loves us.

Balancing the image of love is our first reading where Isaiah gives us a motherly God who loves us with tender embraces.

These images of a fatherly God and a motherly God appeal to people across all boundaries.

- Rich and poor
- Young and old
- Male and female
- Whether healthy or ill
- Among all countries and races
- In all ages of history

God initiates a relationship with us with love.

Our task: we simply need to respond to that love.

The naturalness of our response is so beautifully portrayed in today's Psalm 62:

"Only in God is my soul at rest."

"Only in God is my soul at rest."

Take a moment; close your eyes; and say after me:

"Only in God ... Only in God

Is my soul at rest ... is my soul at rest."

Ahhhh.

Do you have some sense of that rest?

The comfort of God with us?

Perhaps we can use that as a prayer starter when we pray individually.

Now, contrary to the common practice of my using visual aids,

I am going to ask you to supply the visual aid.

Reach into your pocket or purse and find a coin or folding money.

Take one piece of money out and look at it.

If it is paper money, look at the back side for the words

"IN GOD WE TRUST".

If you have a penny, nickel, dime or quarter, look at the heads side.

There it is, in very small letters, "IN GOD WE TRUST".

Who would have guessed, in our secular society, that each piece of money is imprinted with "IN GOD WE TRUST"?

Who would have guessed that it was only in 1956 that our government started the practice of putting those words on our currency.

I wonder, did they have today's Gospel in mind when they decided that?

Certainly, "trust" is part of Jesus' message today:

- Don't worry; trust in God
- We are not in this by ourselves; trust in God.
- Work hard and conscientiously; and trust in God.
- When life throws us curve ball, trust in God.

So, turn to your neighbor and say:

"Neighbor; IN GOD WE TRUST."

Oh, how about each time we take out some cash to pay a clerk at the store we recall those words again:

"IN GOD WE TRUST".

What if we said the words out loud to the clerk!

That would probably cause some odd response,

Jesus starts today's Gospel with the line:

"No one can serve two masters."

That brought a snicker to my face as I thought about life today and how we have lots more than two masters or bosses.

How about you?

Do you think of any of these as your master or boss?

- Your spouse
- Your kids
- Your teacher
- Your doctor
- Uncle Sam
- Your immediate supervisor at work
- Other department people where you work: what does engineering want, what does sales need, what about the manufacturing people
- Oh, and yes, the customer is always right!

In the Gospel Jesus words are:

"No one can serve two masters.

He will either hate one and love the other..."

One of the commentators on today's Gospel, Prof. Pilch, points out a key distinction in the words "hate" and "love".

Prof. Pilch tells us that in the Mediterranean culture of Jesus' time the words "love" and "hate" were not words of *emotion* but more about how closely people were *attached to* the other.

They loved their immediate family members; that is, they were closely attached to them.

Their neighbors were not attached quite so much.

Foreigners were hated, that is they were not attached at all.

The question that Jesus poses to us can be thought of as:

How attached are we to other people?

How attached are we to mammon, that is, money?

How attached are we to God?

Visually, we could look at this dilemma with a flash-back to St. Valentine's Day:



We have spoken about:

- God's love for us
- How our soul is only at rest in God
- How we trust in God

As we approach Lent, we can consider spending some time this Lent on how to finish the words in that heart.

Lent is traditionally a time for prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Today's readings take us to the first of those ... relating to God in prayer.

My prayer for all of us is that we find some way
to pry open some time, each day, to pray.

From my experience that means a bit of discipline:

- Deciding on a time, a regular, consistent time
- Deciding on a place where there is some semblance of peace and quiet
- Deciding on some mix of formal prayer and just resting in the lap of the Lord, just chatting, just listening to the Lord.

The ushers are now going to hand out a small card with ideas from today,
especially the image of the heart for us to ponder and even use to
examine our consciences.

Among the ideas for prayer is what Fr. Simon Lobo left us last Sunday.
It is one of the many forms of prayer from St. Ignatius Loyola.
We have copies of that prayer form on the tables in back.

Blessings on your every effort for Lent 2014.
You are in my prayers.