

6th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (February 12, 2023)

1. First of all: it's really good to be with you again! I'm truly grateful for Fr. Knipper's willingness to cover for me last weekend, but I did miss you. I have offered Mass privately each day since returning home from the hospital, and last Sunday I offered that Mass for all of you and all the members of Holy Rosary Cluster.

I'm overwhelmed by all your kindness—cards, gifts, food, prayers, all your notes and best wishes and concern. You really are spoiling me rotten, you know! But I'm truly grateful, and I can't thank you enough. I know that I'm not yet back to full strength and energy; that's why there are only two Masses this weekend instead of the usual four...and this is very manageable. And you probably noticed that I'm sitting, standing, and walking a bit more gingerly—that's par for the course after the kind of surgery I had. I assure you that I'm getting needed rest; Nancy can confirm that I head upstairs pretty much each midday for a nap, and not only for 10-15 minutes. As you'll see in the bulletin, I plan to resume the usual weekday Mass schedule Monday/tomorrow. Also: I plan to resume our regular weekend Mass schedule this coming weekend, Feb. 18/19. But we'll see how the week goes; if that won't work, I'll let you know on the cluster website and Facebook page. Your flexibility and understanding are hugely appreciated!

2. This is the time of year for the annual appeal from Catholic Charities; I got my mailing on Thursday, if you don't have yours yet, you'll receive it soon. The archbishop has asked us priests to share with you his brief word about this:

“Dear friends—Serving others. Sharing with others. Those were two of the markers for parish vitality that you identified in our synod survey last year. It was heartwarming to see that, because it means that we get it, namely, the love of neighbor practiced by helping anyone in any need is the practice of true religion. That when Jesus comes again, he will judge us on whether or not we helped those in need: those who do will enjoy heaven; those who don't, won't. And that helping the poor is the focus our holy father Francis wants for our Church: to be a Church of the poor (people aware of their dependence), for the poor (anyone in any need). In the end, the most important thing is for us ...to help anyone in any need. Won't you, please? Thanking you in advance for support of the good work of Catholic Charities, I am Sincerely yours in Christ, Michael O. Jackels, Archbishop of Dubuque.”

3. Finally, this gospel. We getting to the meat of the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus giving us the deeper meaning and challenge of the Commandments. “You shall not kill” involves much more than an act of murder, and “you shall not commit adultery” involves not only the act of adultery but also the deliberate nurturing of a selfish desire...even without engaging in the act. We sometimes hear it said that Jesus doesn't really care what we do so long as we are some kind of generic ‘nice person’. In fact, Jesus most emphatically does care how we conduct ourselves; this gospel today allows no other conclusion.

This is so important, especially in light of another claim we often hear these days: “God loves me, accepts me just the way I am.” From this we are supposed to conclude that God accepts me no matter what I do or don't do. If we are ever tempted to that spiritually lazy way of thinking, we need a big reality check. Now, of course God loves us—unconditionally and eternally. God loves us, every single one of us...but he does not love the sin and selfishness we fall into.

Parents, imagine you catch your grade-schooler fighting with a younger sibling, or your teenager treating you with a major dose of disrespect. Now, imagine that same child telling you: “Mom/Dad, God loves and accepts me just the way I am—so why don't you?” (Youngsters and teens—I'd strongly advise against trying that approach!). Parents, of course you love your kids unconditionally...but you love them enough to make sure they know and live out the difference between right and wrong, and that there are consequences for going over the line. In the same way, Jesus loves us too much to allow us to be satisfied

with a half-hearted mediocrity—he loves us so much that he wants the best for us...and he is the One who truly knows what is best for us.

Our bishop-neighbor to our north, Robert Barron (Diocese of Winona-Rochester) recently issued an excellent statement on the true meaning of Jesus' desire to love and embrace everyone without exception. Jesus indeed reaches out with compassion in a particular way to the sinner—but, as the bishop says, that outreach 'was unambiguously and consistently accompanied by his summons to conversion.' God indeed loves each of us, and he loves us so much that he wants us to know the joy of being fully conformed to his Son...and that is what the call to daily conversion and holiness is all about. That is the call that is extended to every one of us without exception. Let's take that call seriously—both for God's sake and for our own.