

The Twenty-Second Sunday of Ordinary

Time

A Homily

29 August 2010

About 8 or 10 years ago I attended this institute when John Shea* was the speaker. He is a marvelous speaker from Chicago who is also a professional story teller. He has a marvelous ability to put the stories of the Bible in most interesting perspective. Following the institute I immediately went and ordered the two books he had written at that time. He has since written at least three more books, all on the Sunday readings for the three cycles. I have all three books, and consult them regularly for homilies. One thing I like is that he does not try to write a homily for the reader, but gives the reader interesting ideas and insights so one can write his own homilies.

After Deacon Hanson called me and asked me to give the homily today, the first thing I did was to go and read today's scriptures and then I went to Shea's book dealing with today's readings. He had written 6 ½ pages giving his explanation of what Jesus was talking about and trying to do. I read over his material several times and realized that Mr. Shea was concentrating on that

part of the reading dealing with the people who were jockeying for position at the head of the banquet table. He had very little to say about inviting the guests who can not pay the host back. I then realized that either he did not know what to say about those verses, or he did not want to address the issue. I can his understand he avoiding the issue because I also tend to avoid that issue since I do not want to deal with “those” people. I understand that dealing with the poor, the homeless, and the destitute is a difficult issue.

I understand perfectly well some of the problems of dealing with the homeless. Two years ago I was serving as a deacon at San Francisco de Paola Catholic Church in down town San Antonio. Because it was a down town church, we had to deal with the homeless constantly. On one occasion a woman with a little girl came to the church and knocked on the door. Fr. Guy Blair gave her the schedule of when food was given out. The woman became angry because Father would not give her something to eat or money right then, so, on leaving, she had her little girl defecate on the church steps. On another occasion two homeless men began to fight at the Church entrance. During the course of the fight one man tried to set the other man on fire and succeeded in setting fire to the front doors of the church. Several years ago Fr. Balty Janacheck was the priest and, at that time, was sleeping in the priest’s residence in the back of the church. The spring air was

rather cool, so he opened the window beside his bed. During the night he was awoken when a hand reached through the window and tried to remove the blanket under which Fr. Balty was sleeping. One can become very frustrated when the homeless come to the Church on Wednesday morning to receive their free lunch. If they do not like what is being offered they will simply throw it on the ground. Every morning, the Saint Vincent de Paul volunteers have to spend some time cleaning up the grounds around the church of the lunches or parts of lunches that litter the grounds.

The homeless frequently smell, are verbally abusive, can have severe mental and emotional problems, and are unreasonably demanding. We would like to try and think that Jesus is not really telling us that we must associate and minister to the homeless, the poor and the destitute. We would like to reason that he is really saying something else; something that does not require me to approach these people personally.

Then I am reminded of Jesus words at the last supper. He told us to take and eat for that bread is his body. He also told us to take and drink for that was the cup of his blood. If we are to take his words of institution quite literally, then we must also take his words about the poor literally. He is actually expecting us to invite those who can not invite us back.

I pray that I can take quite literally Jesus' words when he promises to forgive me of my sins. Then why should I not take quite literally his words when he tells us that I should invite the people I do not like and who do not like me back?

But I don't want to invite those who can not repay. I guess I am afraid of the poor and the homeless. For me to go to the Saint Vincent de Paul Center and serve food is a good way to assuage my conscience, but I can do that and still maintain some distance personally. If I invite them into my home, I must get up close and personal, and that is difficult. I have allowed the homeless, the poor and the destitute into my personal space and, thereby, I have made myself vulnerable; I have taken a personal risk.

What Jesus is suggesting is an outrageous behavior that flies in the face of all that we hold reasonable. But am I not expecting Jesus to be just as unreasonable. I am expecting him to invite me to his banquet knowing that there is nothing I can do to "repay" him. Jesus has promised to forgive me every time I sin. Must I not do the same for the least of his flock? I will be quick to look down my nose at the people in today's reading who want to sit close to the famous, the powerful and the rich. At church on Sunday morning how long do I take to speak to the homeless, the poor or the destitute who sit in the back of the church?

What part of "Feed my sheep." Do we not understand?

Publically he is known as John Shea but, for some unknown reason, his website is listed as www.jackshea.org. You can find his books there or on www.amazon.com. I regularly use four of his books:

*Books by John (Jack) Shea:

- ***The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers & Teachers: The Relentless Widow, Year C***
- ***The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers & Teachers: Eating with the Bridegroom, Year B***
- ***The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers & Teachers: On Earth as it is in Heaven, Year A***
- ***Gospel Light: Jesus Stories for Spiritual Consciousness***