

BIBLICAL NOTES and HOMILIES

By

Fr. Herman Mueller, S.V.D.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (August 3, 1980)

Usually the first reading and the gospel have one and the same theme, since the readings have been selected accordingly. The second reading usually has a theme of its own; it is taken from one of the Letters of the New Testament. Today by chance the theme of the second reading fits in with the first reading and the gospel: **Natural possessions pass, heavenly glory lasts.**

FIRST READING: ECCLESIASTES 1:2; 2:21-23

The Book of Ecclesiastes, or Qohelet asks the fundamental question: "What is the sense of our life?" To this fundamental question of everybody's life the author does not know an answer, so it seems. Man sees nature ruled by the same laws through the centuries, and men themselves do the same things in all generations. But where this consistency comes from and why this consistency exists, we cannot see because we do not understand God's plan. We cannot discover the divine purpose, why the just man sometimes suffers, because the doctrine that God rewards and punishes already everything here on earth finds no justification in actual life. We cannot be pleased by riches, because all these things are very inconsistent. Therefore: "Vanity of vanities. All

things are vanity!" What is the use of making any effort in life? What is the use of trying to be wise when death will end it all? What is the sense of our work and anxiety, when someone else will inherit it? Someone unknown to us, someone who may not care anything about us may waste what we have worked to achieve. About the life hereafter Qohelet did not know much yet. God revealed it clearer only later, with the latest Wisdom Books and in the New Testament.

SECOND READING: COLOSSIANS 3:1-5.9-11

Paul had told the Colossians how important Christ is to them, how high his supreme dignity is as creator, redeemer and head of the Church, who possesses the fulness and reconciles all things (first part, 1:16-2:3). Then he refuted some errors against the dignity of Christ (second part, 2:4-23). And now in the third part (3:1-4:8) the Apostle tells the Colossians and us that life has a real meaning after all, in virtue of what one has become in baptism. We have died to our old self and our new life is hidden now with Christ in God. The deep reality of our life, the thing that can give it meaning, is no longer immediately perceptible. It is hidden in God. Beneath the world of appearances which we often call "real" we can in faith perceive another "hidden" reality which will be made manifest only when Christ, our life appears. We have to be constantly made anew. The Christian must put to death in himself the vices, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, idolatry, not mentioned in today's reading, but found in vv. 5-8. He must be true in his speech (v. 9). This putting on of the new man is a life-long process of growing (v. 10).

Christ is our life. This thought was very dear to Paul. As music is life for a musician, sport for a sportsman, Christ is life for us. Consequently we set our mind and heart on the things which are above and not on the things of this world.

One of the great effects of Christianity is that it destroys the barriers which come from (1) birth and nationality, (2) from ceremonial and ritual differences, and (3) from the different classes, like slave and free man. The ancient world was full of barriers. The Greek looked down on the non-Greek and called him barbarian (literally a man who says "bar-bar"). The Jew, belonging to the chosen people, showed contempt for every non-Jew. The Scythian was notorious as the lowest of the barbarians. The slave was merely a living tool, with no rights of his own.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 12:13-21

This pericope belongs to the material proper to Luke. — It was not uncommon for people in Palestine to take their unsettled disputes to respected Rabbis. Here is a young man who hopes for a favorable decision against his (older?) brother on the problem of their inheritance (Deut 21:15ff; Num 27:1-11). But Jesus refuses to be involved in any dispute about money, for he penetrates to the attitude of greed behind the request. And thus he stresses with a parable the right attitude to and use of material possessions. We shall take heed and guard ourselves against all kinds of "pleonexia", a word often used by St. Paul, greed for more and more material possessions which tend to become one's God (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5).

A farmer had such an abundant harvest that his storehouses were too small. So he tells himself: "You have plenty for the years to come. Relax, eat heartily, drink well. Enjoy yourself!" He decides not what would have been the simplest thing to do, i.e. to add some parts to the already existing storehouses but to tear down everything and build new and greater storehouses.

In God's eyes he is a fool. He is not reproved for being rich, nor is it said that he oppressed the poor and thus became rich. Rather his possessions are of no use as he failed to take into account death that would come that very night. A fool is not the opposite of the intelligent man but the opposite of the wise man. This man here is the practical atheist who ignores God in his practical life and lacks any life-influencing belief in God. He thinks only of indulgence, not of others in need and thus he is implicitly condemned for his lack of concern for the poor.

HOMILY**RICH IN THE LORD'S SIGHT — SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE**

1. Beware of attaching yourself to possessions which become your god! — Material possessions and riches as such are neutral. It depends on us what we are doing with them. In the Old Testament they are often pictured as reward for following God's commandments. Thus the patriarchs were wealthy: Abraham (Gen. 13:2). Isaac (Gen. 26:12), and Jacob (Gen. 30:43).

Entering the promised land the Hebrews were enjoined to keep all the laws of the Lord who in turn would bless them, with all spiritual and material blessings (Deut 8:6-9; 28:1-12). Especially the Wisdom Books show that abundance goes with uprightness of life: "The salvation of the just is from the Lord" (Ps. 37:19). "Happy the rich man found without fault, who turns not aside after gain. Who is he, that we may praise him? He, of all his kindred, has done wonders. For he has been tested by gold and come off safe, and this remains his glory. He could have sinned, but did not, could have done evil, but would not, so that his possessions are secure, and the assembly recounts his praises" (Sir. 31:8-11). "Wealth is good, when there is no sin" (Sir 13:23). As a matter of fact, the profession of a scribe, a wise man, such as the composers of the Wisdom Books, was possible only for those who had leisure and presumably they were men of comfortable means (Sir 38:24ff). Only a lazy man is poor: "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest, then will poverty come upon you like a highwayman and want like an armed man" (Prov. 24:33f).

But there are more texts in the Wisdom Books speaking about the doubtful blessing of riches: "Keeping watch over riches wastes the flesh and the care of wealth drives away rest... The rich man labors to pile up wealth, and his only rest is wanton pleasure... The lover of gold will not be free from sin, for he who pursues wealth is led astray by it" (Sir. 31:1-5). "Gold has dazzled many and perverts the character of princes" (Sir. 8:2). "The rich man answers harshly" (Prov. 18:23). Riches are unprofitable: "They (the rich men) trust in their wealth... Yet in no way can a man redeem himself, or pay his own ransom to God" (Ps. 49:7-8). "This is a grievous evil... riches kept by their owner to his hurt" (Eccl. 5:12). His "abundance allows him not to sleep" (Eccl. 5:11). It is not easy to remain faithful in times of prosperity: "Out of their crassness comes iniquity; their fancies overflow their hearts... They set their mouths in place of heaven" (Ps. 73:4-9).

And to the observation of Proverbs that a diligent man becomes rich, Ecclesiastes would retort: "But what's the use of it. Somebody else may inherit it."

Isaiah 5:8 even curses riches: "Woe to you who joining house to house, who connect field to field." And so does Lk. 6:24: "Woe to you rich, for your consolation is now." Not much better is James' word: "You rich, weep and wail, over your impending miseries" (5:11).

It goes to show, wealth is a gift from God, but we must use it correctly and it is difficult to lead a life centered on the kingdom

of God as the Lord tells us in today's gospel with the parable of the rich fool.

2. St. Paul tells us in the second reading to seek the things that are above and thus overcome our wrong attachment to riches. What seems to be so real in life, is often enough, only appearance. We must believe in the "hidden life" we are living with Christ ever since baptism. Christ must become our life in our acts as he is our life in essence, in our being Christians. This needs strong faith and a continuous trying. If we experience the Lord as our life and our treasure, everything else will lose its attraction.

3. A second attitude and help in overcoming inordinate attachment to riches would be not to worry about our livelihood, but to trust in God's providence (Lk. 12:22-31 = Mt. 6:25-33), illustrated in the gospel of the 8th Sunday of the years, cycle A, which will be explained there.

4. The third way of freeing oneself from greed and covetousness is to become poor, to give away all possessions and follow the Lord in evangelical poverty: "If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor" (Mt. 19:21). So that the Lord can say: "Blest are you poor; the reign of God is yours." (Cf. also Mt. 5:3). This evangelical counsel, however, will be only for those who can take it.

5. For the majority, there remains the other way, namely of using riches in the right way: Giving alms to the poor and thus becoming rich before God. Shrouds have no pockets. We cannot take anything along when we die. We can send it only ahead of us by giving alms to the poor: "Do not live in fear, little flock. It has pleased your Father, to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms. Get purses for yourselves that do not wear out, a never-failing treasure with the Lord which no thief comes near nor any moth destroys. Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be" (Lk. 12:32-34). In opposition to that young man in Mt. 19:21 here the Lord does not speak of selling everything, but of giving alms.

That same truth the Lord in Lk. 16:1-13 (proper to Luke) explains with the parable of the astuteness of the Dishonest Steward; he formulates it thus: "Make friends for yourselves through your use of this world's goods, so that when they (the goods) fall you, a lasting reception will be yours" (Lk. 16:9).

NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (August 10, 1980)

By chance again the second reading fits in with the other two and we could sum up the theme: "You are called to God's glory. Be ready to receive it!"

FIRST READING: WISDOM 18:6-9

The Book of Wisdom is the last writing of the Old Testament, written probably in the first half of the first century B.C., for the Jews of Egypt, encouraging them in their trials and persecutions and putting them on their guard against the dangers of pagan philosophy by giving them a theology of history, especially in the third part (10:1-19:20). After describing the work of God's wisdom from the time of Adam till the entrance of Israel into the promised land (10:1-12:27) and the folly and sad results of idolatry (13:1-15:19) the author explains the wonderful work of wisdom, by comparing the lot of the Israelites with that of the Egyptians (16:1-19:20): (1) The Egyptians were punished by irrational animals, which, however, were a blessing to the Israelites (16:1-15). (2) The Egyptians were punished by fire and hail, but the Israelites were blessed with manna from heaven (16:16-29). (3) The Egyptians were afflicted by the plagues of darkness and the Israelites relieved by the pillar of fire which led them to the promised land (17:1-18:4). (4) The death of the Egyptians' firstborn is contrasted with the rescue of the firstborn of the Israelites (18:5-25). By using the Book of Exodus, the author of Wisdom compares Egypt with Israel, the one incurring the vengeance of God, the other God's protection. In the same act God punished the Egyptians and made Israel glorious. So especially when in the same night Yahweh's angel slew the firstborn of the Egyptians and saved the firstborn of the Israelites.

With the freedom of a poet the author of Wisdom brings some details which the Book of Exodus does not have. The Egyptians determined to put to death the infants of the holy ones (Israelites). Only Moses survived (18:5). As punishment, God killed the sons of the Egyptians in the mighty water (Red Sea) (18:5), whereas the Israelites were rescued. That night was foretold to the Fathers (18:6) so that they could await their liberation (18:7). The Jews had prepared themselves by the offering of sacrifices, the paschal lamb (18:9), which would forever commemorate the deliverance from slavery. The Israelites and we are called to glory.

SECOND READING: HEBREWS 11:1-2. 8-19

By a happy coincidence, today's second reading fits in with the theme of the other two: **We shall look for the city of God.**

The Letter to the Hebrews addresses Jewish Christians to find the change from the older order of things to the new psychologically difficult. These converts are more keenly aware of what they have lost in renouncing Judaism than in what they find in Christianity. They miss the Jewish liturgy. Some of them have been imprisoned (10:32-36), and most are considered renegades by their former fellow Jews. Had God abandoned them? Was their conversion a mistake?

Thus the letter wants to encourage these Jewish Christians. The author shows the superiority of the New- over the Old Covenant, Christ as creator is superior to the angels and as son superior to Moses who was only a servant in the house of God (3:1-19). Christ is the eternal highpriest superior to the Old Covenant and its highpriest (4:14-8:13), more than Melchizedek (7:1-28) and Aaron (5:4; 7-11). His sacrifice is more precious than all sacrifices of the Old Testament (9:1-10:18). Consequently, they must remain faithful in suffering according to the example of the men of faith of old (10:32-12:13). This elaboration of faith, from which today's second reading is taken, is what distinguishes the Letter to the Hebrews (besides the description of the superiority of the Old — over the New Covenant). Just as Romans is the Epistle of salvation, Galatians of liberty, 1 Corinthians of fraternal charity, Hebrews is the Epistle of confident and courageous faith, attachment of mind and of one's being to Christ.

Abraham is the father of all believers. Four stages of Abraham's faith are described: (1) By faith he left his homeland and went to an unknown destination, being sure only that something and some One lay ahead. (2) By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, from Palestine to Egypt, from Egypt to Palestine looking for the city, for the homeland, where he could settle. (3) By faith he expected the son of promise, Isaac. First incredulously, then with great joy and laughingly. (4) By faith he offered up Isaac, believing that God was able to raise him from the dead.

All believers realize that they are only pilgrims. On our journey we go toward our homeland, toward the Lord in faith. Faith is true knowledge since we realize that we already possess the beginning of eternal life, Jesus Christ, whom the Father has sent (Jn. 17:3).

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 12:32-48

In four small passages Luke describes the attitude all disciples of all times should have: to be ready, to be prepared, to be alert for an impending crisis: (1) The little flock waits in the midst of the sameness of every day. It has pleased the Father to give it the kingdom (12:32-34). In some ways one could better take these three verses with the gospel of 1st Sunday: We shall provide ourselves purses in heaven. (2) With our loins girded (in the Orient long robes could make one fall or stumble and thus had to be tucked up into the girdle in readiness for immediate and energetic action), and our lamps burning we shall be like men who are waiting for their master who returns from a wedding, so that the master can find the door and be shown in any time. (3) We shall be like a householder who is alert that no thief can dig a hole through the clay walls of his house and steal. (4) Like faithful stewards we shall take care of the master's household.

What is the nature of this crisis? Matthew places the above third and fourth passage (the second is proper of Luke) in the discourse about the parousia, the second coming of Christ. Luke 12:35-48 speaks about the imminent crisis for the disciples which is followed by a pericope of the imminent crisis for Israel (Lk. 12:54-13:9). The juxtaposition of these three themes indicates that in the mind of Luke they were intimately related. Jesus, he wanted us to understand, was expecting a single great crisis, which would mean death for himself, a searching test for his disciples, and judgment for Israel.

When the crucifixion had become a fact of the past, the parables of watchfulness were still preserved and Christians asked themselves whether these warnings were intended only for the apostles as they faced the crisis brought about by Christ's death, or whether they had a more general and permanent application. What Matthew combines with the parousia and Luke combines with more the immanent crises for the disciples when Christ died, for Christ when he was crucified and for Israel, when it rejected Jesus and Rome conquered Jerusalem, is valid for all of us at all times: We shall be ready for the Lord when he comes.

The Lord then (contrary to the reality of earthly life) will serve us at table.

HOMILY

BE READY FOR THE LORD!

1. Everything is well that ends well. We have to be ready when the Lord comes and knocks (Rev. 3:20); knocks, when he expects something extraordinary from us, when we shall do more for him than we did so far; knocks at our door for the last time here on earth. We have to be sensitive when he wants to talk to us and understand what he wants to tell us.

2. Hardships can make us more alert, tune in our ears to the Lord, but they also can harden our hearts so that we are not willing to listen nor to be ready. The Israelites in Egypt suffered from the Egyptians. They were forced to do slaves' work and their children were killed. They were tempted to think that God might have forgotten them. In reality he revealed himself as Yahweh, as God present to save and to redeem, especially when they marched through the Red Sea. The Egyptians, however, who suffered ten plagues, did not understand what God wanted to tell them. They only became more stubborn and hardened, fighting God and fighting the Israelites. Pharaoh always asked Moses to pray for them and take the plague in question away, only to become more stubborn when God obliged upon the prayer of Moses. No plague made them more fine feeling till finally the tenth and last plague killed their firstborn.

3. Riches too easily want to be enlarged, and there is often no time left to be ready for the Lord who expects us to do more than an average person does for him or to be ready for him when he wants to make his final call. Too many possessions can tie a person down to earth so that he is not ready to move. The more we have, the more we want to have, and we easily think, we cannot live without it. If we look back, we see with how little we could live some years ago; we were probably happier and more content than we are now with all the material improvements we have made. — A Western visitor in India was asked about his impressions after a stint of some weeks. "I saw how poor many people are, living in substandard conditions," he said. "But I must also admit, I saw most of them content in spite of it. Is it perhaps because they have nothing to fear that they could lose, that they do not have to worry about material possessions they do not have as we have them in the West, worrying that we could lose them because of inflation, crises and wars?"

4. We should live as if we were living only in a tent, not in comfortable buildings. Abraham was convinced that he as all the patriarchs was a wanderer, a stranger, who by "faith sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob... for he was looking forward to the city with foundations" (Hebr. 11:9-10). And that faith enkindled in Abraham that seeking for a homeland (11:14), made him open to God's call for something higher. All wanderers are always thankful for hospitality shown to them, as Abraham was thankful when Ephron the Hittite allowed him to bury his wife Sarah in a field in Machpelah (Gen. 23:17). And viceversa Abraham, the wanderer, was most hospitable when visitors came to him, as for instance the angel of the Lord going down to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:3). Yes, he even interceded for the people that God might spare them, had there been just ten just people (Gen. 19:16-33).

5. Whatever we have on earth is not ours; we are only stewards. But again, there are stewards and stewards. Some behave as if they were owners, maltreat their fellowmen, squander the property of their master, become proud and arrogant, they eat, drink, and get drunk (Lk. 12:45). They are not ready for their master, when he comes. Others are faithful, always aware that they only take the place of their master, are looking forward to his return. They can never be surprised, for they know: to be prepared is everything!

TWENTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (August 17, 1980)

Once again all three readings illustrate the same theme: **Signs, jobs, persons to be contradicted.**

FIRST READING: JEREMIAH 38:4-6. 8-10

Every prophet is first and foremost a messenger of God, telling his contemporaries what God has to say concerning their daily life, concerning the situation they are in order to understand the signs of the time. In other words, they are the conscience of a nation.

A conscience, however, tells the truth, if a person likes it or not. Popularity is not the measure of a true prophet, but truth. The result is: Most prophets, if any, were not popular. After all, who likes to hear the truth, especially if this truth is unpleasant.

Jeremiah by nature finefeeling and withdrawn, melancholic and certainly in no way a fighter, was given the unpleasant task to tell the Israelites clearer and clearer the impending exile of Babylon. Since his fellowmen persisted in disobeying God's commandments, God would finally have to bring them into exile of Babylon (587-538).

Today's first reading stems from the time before the fall of Jerusalem in the time of king Zedekiah (597-87). The prophet foresaw the end of Jerusalem and under God's inspiration also saw the uselessness of making a revolt against king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605/4-562). It would be without success and just make things worse. Prudent submission to Nebuchadnezzar could perhaps avert the worst. And thus by God's order submission to Babylon was what Jeremiah was preaching these years before the fall of Jerusalem.

This however was interpreted as high treason, as demoralizing the morale of the soldiers, and the prophet was thrown into a cistern full of mud. He would have soon died, had not a kind Ethiopian by the name of Ebedmelech taken pity on him and pulled him out of the cistern.

A prophet can cause discord, although he speaks in the name of the Lord because people want to hear what flatters them. But in the last analysis the truth will set us free (Jn. 8:32).

SECOND READING: HEBREWS 12:1-4

By chance again, this second reading fits in with the theme of the other two readings. The pericope tells us something about the trials we have to submit to as Christ did. For "the kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the violent takes it by force" Mt. 11:12).

The second reading of last Sunday showed us heroes of faith, especially Abraham, the father of all believers. In that same chapter 11 of Hebrews other heroes of faith of the Old Testament are presented to us, so that the author can continue today: "We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin . . . Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus" (Hebr. 12:1-2). Christ is the top witness and perfecter of our faith. Our life is something like a race in a stadium where all the witnesses from heaven, the saints who made the race already, watch and encourage us, especially the Lord himself, who endured the hardest test, crucifixion.

Seeing him we can never complain. After all, we have not yet resisted to the point of shedding our blood (Hebr. 12:4) as Christ did. His example must make us willing and empower us to endure also opposition of sinners (Hebr. 12:9). To follow Christ does not mean to have an easy life, but to embrace the cross.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 12:49-53

That the imitation of Christ does not spare us hardships is even more explained by today's gospel. Christ, to be sure, is the prince and king of peace (Is. 9:5). But this is not an inactive and easy peace. Rather, Jesus is "destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel" (Lk. 1:34). His coming cannot be ignored and we cannot remain neutral. We have to take a stand: "The man who hears my word and has faith in him who sent me possesses eternal life . . . He who refuses to honor the Son refuses to honor the Father who sent me" (Jn. 5:24.23).

Christ himself was not spared hardships. The Father had selected the cross for him as means of redeeming mankind. And since it was Christ's food to do the will of his Father (Jn. 4:34) he was eager to be baptized with that baptism of suffering (Lk. 17:25; cf. Mk. 10:38: "baptized in the same bath of pain"), although at the same time he was also scared of it (cf. Lk. 22:42), to be glad, when it was all over: "When a woman is in labor she is sad that her time has come. When she has born a child, she no longer remembers her pain for the joy that a man has been born into the world" (Jn. 16:21). The Baptist had baptized only with water, Christ intended to baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire (Lk. 3:16).

Fire in the first place stands for judgment, where the impious will be destroyed (Is. 66:15-16; Ez. 38:22). But at the same time it purifies the elect (Is. 1:25; Jer. 6:29; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2-4).

Jesus then is pointing out his role as inaugurating the eschatological time by passing through the fire of trouble and testing. Possibly Luke also thinks of the fire of Pentecost (Acts 2:3.19) and the gift of the Holy Spirit whom Christ would send us as fruit of his death and resurrection (Jn. 7:37-39; 19:34; 20:23).

Peace one will have only if one does God's will as Christ did. But since the world often enough has values different from those of Christians Christ will be the crisis of division between believers and those who refuse to accept Him. Mich 7:6 already foresaw

that family relationships would be disrupted. The good news which the Lord brings can be bad news to those who refuse to accept it. And the result will be: In one house of five, father and son will be divided, daughter and daughter against her mother (Lk. 12:53).

HOMILY

SIGNS AND PERSONS OF CONTRADICTION

1. Most of us would like to be appreciated and popular. But popularity is not necessarily a clear sign of greatness. It could be accomplished at the expense of truth. Whenever God puts us in charge of somebody as in a family as father or mother, in school as principal or teacher, in a parish as pastor, in a municipality as official, as mayor or governor, we are responsible for our subjects, not only for their material — but also for their spiritual well-being. A prophet, a man of God, anybody who takes God's place is a watchman as God told the prophet Ezekiel: "Thus the word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, I have appointed you as watchman for the house of Israel. When you hear a word my mouth, you shall warn them for me.' If I say to the wicked man: 'You shall surely die;' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his wicked conduct so that he may live: that wicked man shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, on the other hand, you have warned the wicked man, yet he has not turned away from his evil nor from his wicked conduct, then he shall die for his sin, but you shall save your live" (Ez. 3:17-19). To be conscience for somebody, however, can mean to be disliked, to be contradicted, and even insulted and persecuted.

2. The Lord had to tell the truth, no matter how little at times his hearers would like it. "I am the way, the life and the truth" (Jn. 14:6) he could say. And yet at the same time Simeon could already say to Mary at the presentation of Jesus in the Temple: "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed" (Lk. 2:34). Or as the psalmist long ago had put it: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it" (Ps. 118:23-24). Christ's message was not always easy to understand nor to accept. For some he was too radical, for others not radical enough. Even the Baptist for some time was not sure what to say concerning this Jesus who that he

sent a delegation to ask: "Are you He who is to come or do we look for another?" and Jesus could only answer: "Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me" (Mt. 11:6).

The Pharisees had their ideas about the Law of Moses, about the role of the Messiah. When Christ's ideas did not fit in with their concepts, they rejected him similarly as did some disciples: This sort of talk is hard to endure! How can anyone take it seriously" (Jn. 7:60)! Only thus could they remark to Jesus' demand: "If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn. 7:52).

And when he foretold his death on the cross, even his disciples did not follow him but fled when he was taken captive (Mt. 26:56). Christianity is the religion of the cross and thus a scandal and a stumbling block.

3. Since Christ demands total commitment, people in any given community, smaller or bigger, may not always take the same stand, but rather there are gaps, generation gaps. Usually we combine with this idea of difference in age; they are psychological gaps. But there are perhaps even more theological gaps, not so much about theoretical distinctions and definitions, but about our stand to Christ, to the church, the going to church and the receiving of the sacraments. And this is not limited to a certain age. The break can be open, people leave the church, people say an open "no" to the Lord. This hurts, if it happens to a member of the family.

More hurting, however, than this open rebellion against Christ is this apathy, this lukewarm behavior, this indifference, when a husband is worried about his wife who does not care much to pray, when a wife is worried about her husband who hardly ever goes to church or is flirting around, a son or a daughter who has good parents but finds them old fashioned and the church too much institutionalized so that slowly he or she stays away from Mass, from the sacraments, from the church and goes with doubtful companions. Some try to console themselves saying: "One can remain faithful also without explicit long prayers, without going to Mass every Sunday." One can refer to "good people" who do not show much external piety. And yet, one cannot cut oneself off from the stream of living water without dying of thirst in the long run, depriving oneself of the bread of life in word and sacrament without slowly starving to death.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (August 24, 1980)

The last Sundays by chance the theme of the second reading fitted in with the theme of the other two readings. Today it does not. Today one could meditate on the topic of the second reading: **To correct is a sign of love.**

The gospel, as it stands, speaks certainly about the narrow gate, the special, wholehearted effort we have to make if we want to enter heaven. And in that sense practically all commentaries explain the pericope of today. A second theme.

But the composers of the liturgy of today obviously concentrated on the last verses of the pericope: "Men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 13:29); and thus, together with Is. 66:18-21 (especially "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory" (Is. 66-18) the theme of the **universality of the Church** presents itself as a third theme.

FIRST READING: ISAJAH 66:18-21

Trito-Isaiah (Is. 58-66) was written by an unknown author for the Jews who had returned from exile ca. 538-510. The first enthusiasm was soon spent, the expected salvation did not come as fast as some had hoped for. Thus Trito-Isaiah stressed the importance of true piety and told the Israelites that salvation would come in spite of all obstacles. Sion-Jerusalem after a final judgment of God would become the religious center of the world (Is. 60:1-22; 66:18-24).

Moses had seen only a glimpse of God's glory (Ex. 33:18-23). Now all nations shall see his glory (Is. 66:18). The Lord will set up a sign among them. This could mean a signpost showing the way to those whom God sends. But the sign could also be the act of sending the messengers. From those who have been preserved from the judgment of the nations (the "survivors") God will send messengers to the nations as missionaries to the far islands in order to proclaim God's glory among the other nations. This is the first sure and certain mention of mission as we today use the term: the sending of individuals to distant peoples in order to proclaim

God's glory among them. Trito-Isaiah mentions the nations known at his time as representatives for all nations: Tarshish, a phoenician trading city in Spain, Put and Lud, peoples in Africa, Mesech and Tubal to the south-east of the Black Sea, Javan, standing for the Ionians of Asia Minor or Greece.

And ever more wonderful is that these messengers of the gospel taken from the Gentiles will bring as offering to the Lord all the Jews in the diaspora ("all your brethren" Is 66:20). This is a priestly service. But the author goes on: "And some of them (of these messengers from the Gentiles) also I take as priests and levites," says Yahweh (Is 66:21). This is a thing the orthodox never dreamed of: the admission of heathen to the innermost circles of the priesthood. The new Israel, the Church, will be really Catholic.

SECOND READING: HEBREWS 12:5-7. 11-13

The second reading of the last two Sundays had spoken about the faith of Abraham, the other witnesses, and of Christ. It was all said to Christians in trials. So the pericope of today goes on and tells these Christians: persecutions, trials are signs of God's special love for us. **The Lord disciplines those he loves.** (Hebr. 12:6).

We all remember our father at home. A father disciplines his children, which at the time often looks as undeserved and exaggerated. But later on we understand that he meant well, after all. It is the same with God. His trials seem to be harsh and undeserved. Years later we understand a little more why he sent them.

We modern men may not all agree with this picture, since it seems too disciplinarian to us, too much of an expression of power and moodiness, not democratic enough. We find punishment more intimidating than helpful, destroying the finest confidence between parents and children. One should more talk things over and motivate. But is it really the last in psychology and education that discipline is out? Or is this picture of a patriarchal age, rightly understood, still valid, after all?

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 13:22-30

Here we have a pericope which partly also Matthew has, but in different places. It would seem that it belongs to the special sources of Luke which Luke formulated as it now stands.

When the Jews were under foreign rule, without the possibility of physical retaliation and of winning back their political

independence, many found compensation in the thought that in the world to come they would be honored guests at the Messianic banquet and the Gentiles would be excluded. Jesus reverses this popular imagination: The Jews who refuse the invitation of the gospel will stand outside of the banquet hall, excluded with doors locked and will see to their great dismay that the Gentiles are sitting at Messianic banquet. This is one of the intentions of today's pericope.

The question which someone raises: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" was a point of discussion in apocalyptic literature at that time. Thus we read in 4 Ezra 8:1.3: "And he answered me and said: 'This age the Most High has made for many, but the age to come for few . . . Many have been created, but few shall be saved!'" Rabbinical discussion distinguished between the temporary Messianic kingdom which belongs to the present age to which only a few would be admitted and the final age of the Messianic kingdom into which all Israelites would enter. This is the background of the question: "Will those who are saved be few?" Christ does not answer directly, since he does not want to satisfy curiosity with idle speculations. One shall not waste time but shall leave the question up to the mercy of God. The kingdom is present and the door is open. Everybody shall try hard (the Greek expression used speaks of agony) to enter before it is too late.

Then it does not help to brag about the fact that one was a Jew. Mere physical descendancy does not make a man an Israelite. Nor is it enough to have seen Christ and eaten with him in mere physical contact without having done his or the Father's will. This physical contact alone is not enough to know Christ nor will he recognize us as his own.

In short, the Jews will be shut out, but the pagans, coming from all the nations, will eat at the banquet. And yet, there is hope that also the Israelites at the end will enter, after all: "Some who are last will be first and some who are first will be last" (Lk 13:30). According to time the Jews are first, in actual entering the kingdom, they will be last. But that last is actually an expression of hope, after all. The pagans are called last, but enter first.

HOMILY

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

1. God is all perfect and universal. It took many different nations created after his image and likeness to express his fulness somehow. One nation alone could have never manifested God's

greatness to us. The many nations as the Priestly Source in Genesis 10 shows are sign of God's richness and fulness. He is so perfect that millions of people can never express fully his perfection.

2. From all these nations God elected Israel as his chosen people, starting with Abraham. He called him out of Ur and Haran to go to an unknown land: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you" (Gen 12:2-3). God did not call Abraham to make him just the father of the Jews; he did not choose the Jews as his own for their own sake, for their own glory. But in Abraham, in the Jews, all other people and nations should be blessed.

3. Israel should become the center, the holy mountain to which all nations would come as pilgrims. The prophets often use this picture. "In the days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it. Many people shall come and say: 'Come, let us climb the Lord's mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.' For from Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Is 2:2-3; cf. Mic 4:1-2).

The first reading of today brings another such text: "I come to gather nations of every language: they shall come and see my glory" (Is. 66:18). And then, as we saw, mentioned the representatives of that time: nations from Spain, Greece, Africa, and Asia Minor.

4. All these different nations shall come with gifts: "Nations shall walk by our light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look around; they all gather and come to you. Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses . . . Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedars from Midian and Ephah. All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praise of the Lord" (Is. 60:3-6). Originally this text speaks about the return of the Jews from exile. Strangers will bring Zion's sons and daughters back to Jerusalem; and they will come with gifts. But ever since Epiphany in connection with the feast of the Magi and Ps 72:10, this text has been applied to the nations who all come to the Lord, each one with its gifts. All nations are necessary to make up the fulness of the new Zion, the Church, and unless each nations has brought its gifts, there is something missing. Only then the Church is Catholic, worldwide.

5. Considering themselves as better than the rest or relying on a mere physical desendency from Abraham as the sole requirements, many Jews rejected Christ. The Lord makes clear in today's gospel that such external titles are not enough. — Mere observance of our Christian customs will not suffice either. We must know the Lord in daily life.

The Jews were inclined to look down on pagan nations. And yet before God all nations are good. All different races have their place in the Church. The Church is not really Catholic unless all nations bring in their gifts, and some people have some talents others do not have in the same way.

6. Slowly a certain anti-Jewish feeling has developed among many people. But again, the climax of the Church will come only, when the Jews will become Catholic. In different places of the New Testament this return of the Israelites to Christ is indicated as a hope. So in today's gospel: The first will be last and the last, will be first (Lk. 13:30). The Jews will be temporarily the last to enter the kingdom, but they will enter, after all. In a similar way Jesus tells the Jews: 'You will not see me any more till you say: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'' (Mat. 23:39, which according to many also means: till the Jews will welcome him in the parousia.

St. Paul explains the final conversion of the Hebrews as a mystery he received from the Lord. And the high time of the Church will come, when the Jews enter it. This coming event makes Paul exclaim: "How deep are the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable his judgments, how unsearchable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has given him anything so as to deserve return? For from him and through him and for him all things are. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:35-36). — So we can only hope and pray that the chosen people may enter the Church.

HOMILY

ENTER THE NARROW GATE!

1. Many of us would like to know how many people will be saved. Will the majority of people be in heaven or in hell? That question probably will be answered differently by different people. Some will try to answer the question from Scripture. But probably the answer will more come from somebody's picture of God he has in his subconscious. The Lord tells us not to waste any time with idle questions. This is sure: the kingdom of heaven is here and the door is open. We shall try hard to enter.

2. There is no **predestination to hell**. And the Lord has nowhere said that the majority goes to hell either. "Many, I tell you, will try to enter and be unable" (Lk. 13:24) and "How often have I wanted to gather your children together as a mother bird collects her young under her wings, and you refused me" (Lk 13:34) brings out only the seriousness of the situation.

3. The Lord uses the expression: "Strive to enter!" This expression means we have to use our whole energy, we have to make a real effort, we have to use all our forces. "From John the Baptizer's time until now the kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt 11:13). The entry is not automatic and life as a Christian is not a *laissez-faire*.

4. Mere membership, merely a baptismal certificate does not suffice. "We ate and drank in your company. You taught in our streets" (Lk 13:26) many could change into: "We went to Mass quite regularly. heard your sermons." But the Lord will answer: "That is not enough. Did you put into practice what you heard? Did you live your Mass? I do not know you." We have to strive, to climb. Not to go forward means to go backward. There is no standstill. There are no mere privileges. Decisive is our active response to Christ's call, our daily response to his summons.

5. There is a time limit for all our efforts. Once the door will be shut, then it will be too late. Some people think: A good act of contrition before our death is all that is needed, and they put things off. So they take their time. We will die the way we lived. To make an act of contrition after a long life of sin without any real effort will not be easy, if not impossible. Thomas More, the chancellor of Henry VIII of England, warned one of his relatives not to go on with his bad life but to mend his ways, whereupon the relative answered: "All I have to do before I die is to say: 'My Jesus, mercy!'" One good day he was riding over a bridge when his horse was frightened and threw him, the rider, off into the river. After a while the relative a last time came up from the engulfing waves and shouted: "Go to hell!" to disappear forever.

6. Mere aesthetic is not enough. Somebody may know Christianity as art, may appreciate the beauty of our churches. The Lord must be a living reality for us. The story goes of an expert of Christian art how a priest tried to talk to him about the seriousness of life and to prepare him for his last hour. Finally the priest took a beautiful cross of ivory hanging over the bed of the dying to help him make an act of contrition. The dying opened his eyes and said: "Spanish masterpiece, seventeenth century." He put his head back on his pillow and died.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (August 31, 1980)

As usual on most Sundays, the first reading and the gospel have one theme: "Humble yourself and you will be exalted." The second reading has a theme of its own: The old Covenant was a covenant of awe. In the New Covenant Christ is our mediator whom we can easily approach.

FIRST READING: SIRACH 3:17-18. 20. 28-29

The Book of Ecclesiasticus or (Jesus) Sirach was written by Jesus Sirach, an inhabitant of Jerusalem somewhere in between 200 and 180 B.C. He was a member of the scribal class who had travelled abroad, settled in later years in Jerusalem and opened a school for the scriptural and moral instruction of his younger fellow countrymen. There he composed this book. The Book of Ecclesiasticus is similar to the Book of Proverbs. But the Book of Proverbs is more a collection of popular proverbs, wisdom and experience of a community, whereas Sirach is more a collection of sentences of personal experience. Reflecting on our life, Sirach states that it should be devoted to pursuit of wisdom because wisdom is close to God. A man should seek to give God due praise and honor. Such a man, however will always fear the Lord and lead a good moral life. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Sir 1:14). Reverence and obedience to God's word will make us grow in wisdom. From this "fear of the Lord" springs humility. And thus Sirach speaks in the second half of chapter 3 about humility.

Humility gives a true estimate on self. Through it a man performs duty, avoids what is beyond his understanding and strength. Pride, however, begets false greatness, misjudgment, stubbornness, sorrow, affliction, and perdition.

The attitude of a great and thus humble man is to listen humbly. The greater a man is, the more he must humble himself.

SECOND READINGS: HEBREWS 12:18-19.22-24a

One of the main intentions of the Letter to the Hebrews is to show the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. Jesus is the eternal highpriest who redeems us with his own blood once

and for all. The highpriest of the Old Covenant could go into the sanctuary once a year and try to atone with the blood of an animal. The sacrifices had to be repeated again and again.

The superiority of the New over the Old Covenant shows itself also in this that the Covenant of Mt. Sinai was established in trembling and fear. God impressed the Israelites by his greatness and majesty shown in lightning and thunder. He told Moses: "Set limits for the people all around the mountain, and tell them: Take care not to go up the mountain or even to touch its base. If anyone touches the mountain he must be put to death" (Ex 19:12). And in Deut 5:2-27 Moses recalls the establishing of the covenant this way and says to his fellow Jews: "When you heard the voice from the midst of darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, you came to me in the person of all your tribal heads and elders, and said . . . 'Why should we die now? Surely this great fire will consume us. If we hear the voice of the Lord, our God, any more, we shall die . . . Go closer, you, and hear all that the Lord, our God will say, and then tell us what the Lord, our God, tells you; we will listen and obey.'"

The New Covenant is different. We have free access to Jesus, our mediator. People can go to the altar and take a close look at the great mystery of the Mass. The new Jerusalem awaits us after our life, God's angels are expecting us, God himself awaits us and all the saints who have reached their heavenly goal. All this is so since Jesus is the mediator between the Father and us, since He is God and man. Thus our predominant attitude is love, not fear.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 14:1. 7-14

One Sabbath Jesus was invited to a dinner. Dinners were always the time for conversations. So we find it in Esther, Ecclesiasticus 32, The Epistle of Aristaeus and especially in the Symposium of Plato. (By the way, it is interesting to note that our scientific symposia originally took place at a meal and got the name from the meal.) Of course we have to leave open how much Jesus actually spoke at such a meal and how much a pericope is due to this particular literary form, composed here in this case by Luke. Would Jesus, for instance, have dared to tell his host bluntly: "When you give a meal, invite the poor" (Lk 14:13)?

Jesus is invited, but nobody gives him a particular place. The other guests, especially Pharisees, however look for the best places. Jesus observes this fact and gives an admonition in form of a parable. Thus it is not a mere piece of etiquette as we have it in Prov 25:6-7:

"Claim no honor in the king's presence, nor occupy the place of great men; for it is better that you be told, 'Come up closer!' than that you be humbled before the prince." Rather Jesus tells the Pharisees and us as well: (1) Nobody has a right to a particular place because of a certain position or job. The Pharisees and the Jews were inclined to think so but were put in the last place. The sinners and publicans, however received the places of honor. We rather humble ourselves; then God can use us and promote us. (2) Our doing good and doing favors should be disinterested. We should not invite people to a banquet who will invite us back in return: our friends, brothers, kinsmen, rich neighbors, but rather we should invite poor people who can never return the favor. Only then we are sincerely good, imitating God who will repay us at the resurrection.

HOMILY

HUMBLE YOURSELF AND YOU WILL BE EXALTED

1. The story goes of a Capuchin who started a sermon, saying: "Humility is a difficult virtue. But thanks be to God. I got it!" And everybody laughed, because everybody realized that we are really like this: we think, we are humble, but almost everybody else thinks the opposite. Did not the Pharisees say the same? But our idea of a Pharisee is different.

2. **Pride** is the idea that God owes us a reserved seat in heaven, just because we were baptized or because we are a Religious or a priest. If the scribe and Pharisees arrogated to themselves privileges and demanded preferential treatment they did so on the grounds of their observance of the law, on their standing as religious men. They took for granted that God would see things in this way also. But he was not and is no respecter of persons, neither then nor now.

Pride is the quest for power for its own sake, harsh domination of others and self-satisfaction unconcerned about other. By nature we are rather proud and looking for recognition. Humility is not innate in us. As a matter of fact humility is a typical Christian virtue; one does not find it in pagan philosophical book as recommended virtue. Christ told us: "Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). After all, "though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he did empty himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it

was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, on a cross. Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:6-11).

3. Humility does not mean to be indifferent to one's own situation, work and progress. It is not to be equated with inability to accept responsibility. It does not mean an inferiority complex, indecisiveness, fearfulness. Rather, humility is the courage to accept our deepest reality, i.e. that we are creatures and that whatever we have is a gift of God. We have nothing from ourselves, but we owe our life to God. A humble man thanks God for what he is. He explores himself and develops himself. He does not refuse to know his talents, but rather uses the talents he has received.

4. There is a refined form of pride which looks disinterested, even heroic. It is the superiority of those who have something to say or do, a mission to carry out. Such people are virtuous, faithful to their principle, no matter what it costs, they do it for the Lord, but in reality it is for their own satisfaction, after all, no matter how subtle that self-satisfaction is.

5. "Humble yourself and you will be exalted! Look for the last place and you will get the first one!" That could be taken for a trick, a device, technique to get indirectly what one wanted in the first place. But this is not the intention of the Lord. Lk. 17:7-10 tells us: "If one of you had a servant plowing or herding sheep and he came in from the fields, would you say to him, 'Come and sit down at table?' Would you not rather say, 'Prepare my supper. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink afterwards?' Would he be grateful to the servant who was only carrying out his orders? It is quite the same with you who hear me. When you have done all you have done no more than our duty." It is probably one of the hardest parables, which we would like to overlook. The farmer of the parable is not a wealthy man. He has one slave only, who must do the farm work and also serve at table. As a slave there is no question of wages for his services. The master does not see why he should thank the slave for carrying out his order. Jesus draws the morale of the parable: the disciples, we, are God's slaves and have no claim for reward for doing what God expects of us. We must humbly acknowledge that we are poor servants. There is

no suggestion that our work is useless. But the reward of good works is a free gift; we have no right to it. This is perhaps the hardest lesson. We must not look for reward. To be allowed to work for God, for his kingdom is reward in itself. A life of a child of God is enough of reward.

Recognition eludes those who demand it and comes to those who think more highly of others than themselves. True dignity is always unconscious and honor (whether conferred by God or man) is always unexpected.

6. With this we come to the second point of today's parable. It is a common human characteristic to cultivate the society only with one's own kind. The Pharisees did not associate with those who did not live as they did, following the Law. In our being good and doing favors we should not calculate and be good only or mainly to people of our own kind. This is not real goodness but just an exchange. They will "retaliate" and invite us in return. Where is our merit? This is not real Christian yet. Pagans do that much. We should invite people who cannot do us favors in return: poor, crippled, unknown people. If we are disgusted and turn sour if thanks does not come, we prove to ourselves that we are still selfish. If we are sulking because our name was (perhaps only by oversight) omitted from a list of people who were working hard, people mentioned with distinction, we are proud.

What are our motives behind our generosity? We may give from a sense of duty which we cannot escape as we cannot escape paying income tax. People may admire us for that. But it is not disinterested charity yet. — We may help because of a certain self-interest, kind of investment which will go on our credit side on our ledger with God. — We may help in order to feel superior. But such help hurts more than it is beneficial — Finally we can give because we just cannot help but giving. God is good and we try to follow him.

Is gratuitous giving not inhuman and intolerable? Do we not feel frustrated? Do we not all expect thanks? We have only two ways out: Exalt ourselves or accept it and humble ourselves, placing ourselves in God's hands and live for him and his kingdom. The less we look for reward and thankfulness, the more we will get. We ourselves should always be thankful and appreciate everything, but demand nothing from others.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (September 7, 1980)

As to be expected, the second reading has its own theme: Paul asks Philemon to treat Onesimus as a brother, not as a slave any longer. The first reading would perhaps lead us to a different interpretation, if we would not read it with the gospel in mind. Then it tells us: **Wisdom helps us to understand God's will which in this case is: Renounce everything and follow Christ!**

FIRST READING: WISDOM 9:13-18

The second part of the Book of Wisdom is an encomium on wisdom and speaks about its origin and value for rulers (Wisd. 6:1-9:19). Solomon was the wise man and especially the wise ruler. But he more than anybody else declares clearly that wisdom is not to be acquired by human efforts, but mainly by prayer, since it is a gift from God, not so much one's own achievement. Who can know God's plans? Our human intellect is not capable to understand what God intends. We can hardly guess at what is on earth. Even visible and tangible things are often a puzzle for us. How much less can we understand heavenly, divine realities. The soul would like to swing itself up, but the body weighs us down (9:15). Especially this verse 15 would be the link with the gospel: If we want to understand God's plans we have to deny ourselves. And lastly it is only God's spirit from on high who gives us wisdom, teaching us what pleases God, teaching us (in the context of the gospel) how to renounce everything and follow Christ.

SECOND READING: PHILEMON 9b-10. 12-17

Philemon is the shortest Pauline Letter. Philemon was a Colossian who had been converted by Paul himself (Phm. v. 9). His slave Onesimus had run away — having stolen some of his master's goods (vv. 15-18) — and had somehow reached Paul in prison (v. 10). The Apostle converted and baptized him and sent him back to Philemon which he had to do according to law. But he gave him a short letter along, appealing to the charity of Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, the Apostle's spiritual son. Philemon had lost a slave only to gain a brother (vv. 15 f) thus becoming really "profitable" as the name Onesimus mean. And as a brother, not as a slave any longer, should Philemon treat Onesimus.

This short letter puts before us the attitude of the primitive Church to slavery which for some might be a little disappointing because it is not radical enough for them. But Paul, as the early Church, was realistic. In the social structure of the age, the abolition of slavery was impossible. The Christian slave should be considered and treated as a brother, not as a chattel. Paul would welcome the freeing of Onesimus (Phm 14-16 21). Slowly and in time the leaven of the gospel of the equality of all and of brotherhood in Christ would slowly but surely make slavery obsolete.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 14:25-33

Jesus had finished his table talks (Lk. 14:1-24) and now goes on to Jerusalem. People may think he is going to install his kingdom, but for him going to Jerusalem means, especially in the gospel of Luke, going to be crucified. People seem to have been enthusiastic. But the Lord must disillusion them. Whoever wants to follow him must (1) love him more than anybody else on earth, even father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters; yes even his own life. The expression "hate" is a typical Semitic formulation. Instead of saying "loving Christ more than father and mother" they would say "loving Christ and hating father and mother". (2) bear his own cross and come after Christ, i.e. be willing to make such sacrifices which could amount to the hardest sacrifice at that time: bearing the cross and being crucified as Christ was, for Christ's sake.

This resoluteness and the cost of discipleship Christ illustrates by two parables:

(1) No architect would build a tower before he has figured out exactly if he has enough money to build. Otherwise having to stop building with the building half-finished he would bring ridicule upon himself. — Whoever wants to follow Christ must think it over, if he is able to do so; otherwise he would better not follow Christ.

(2) A king who wants or has made war against another king will first calculate exactly how many soldiers he has to be sure if he can dare making war or how well equipped and trained his soldiers are if his opponent has twice as many soldiers; otherwise he will ask for peace before he starts the war to save himself from full destruction. — To follow Christ need equal serious deliberation. To follow him only half of the way would mean catastrophe.

In short, before one wants to follow Christ, one has to figure out the cost. Otherwise, one better does not follow him.

HOMILY

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

1. The pericope of Lk 14:25-35 according to the introduction in Lk 14:25 seems to be addressed to "a great crowd", not just to the disciples. But since the first three verses (Lk 14:25-27) Matthew (Mat 10:37 f) places in the missionary mandate to the apostles and the last verses of the discourse (Lk 14:34f), missing in today's gospel, are to be found in Mt. 5:13, which is usually also understood as address to the disciples, Lk. 14:25-35 could be also understood as addressed to the disciples. In the first case then, today's pericope would speak about the resoluteness of every Christian who wants to follow Christ; in the second, Luke would tell us what are the true qualities of a disciple. The difference is real. But we can combine both: What is true in the fullest sense of a disciple is in a relative way also true for every Christian: Even if he, for instance, would not have to renounce all his possessions materially, he would have to be detached from them at least spiritually.

2. To be a Christian, and even more to be a disciple, means to place Christ in the center of our life. We must love him above everything. Anything else can take only second place. Luke who usually is more radical with his demand for the imitation of Christ expresses this in typical Semitic fashion: Whoever wants to follow Christ must hate father and mother, instead of saying: he must love Christ more than his father and mother as Mt 10:37 has it.

For the first Christians faith in Christ not seldom meant exclusion from the family. For us this will be the exception, but there will be times when we will have to take a stand for Christ which can mean a stand against somebody dear to us or a superior. This happened to Thomas More, the chancellor of King Henry VIII of England. The king wanted him to declare his marriage with Catherine null and void. But More in conscience could not do it and was thrown in jail by his king. Even his wife and favored daughter Margaret, visiting him in jail, wanted to persuade him to acknowledge the king as highest religious authority to save his life. "How many years could we still live together?" More asked his wife. "About twenty," came the answer. "Twenty, if you would have said, thousand! But twenty. How could I desert my Lord Christ who has been so faithful to me for so many years, for living twenty years with you against Him!"

3. Christ does not want to frighten anybody, but wants to make sure that Christianity and even more Religious life is not something

easy, but something that demands all our efforts, something to be thought over before one starts. How do we advertise Christianity, the Religious life, the priesthood? Do we talk about the beautiful playgrounds, the different facilities of mass media, the good library, the possibility of visits of relatives and vacations at home? Or do we demand something of them? Christ spoke about the cross. Every Galilean had seen such crucifixions as the Roman way of squashing any upcoming political revolt, and knew the cruelty of the cross. For us the cross has become a decoration piece which does not frighten us. Jesus most likely did not want to say that Christianity would bring Christians in tension with the Roman government, but rather that every Christian has to be willing to make every sacrifice, even to be a martyr on the cross.

But the cross is not just the matter of one day, as it could look here in this context, but of dally life as well. Thus in Lk 9:23 we find the other version: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps!

4. The Lord does not look for big numbers but for quality. And actually, do we not know from experience that schools which demand something concerning admission and passing grades in the long run are more looked more than those which throw the grades or the diploma at somebody? Did the number of certain Religious societies not always go up, when they were strict? And is perhaps one reason for the growing number of Communists also that they demand total dedication from their members? Can Christ not require equally much or more from us?

5. Think it over before you become a Christian and even more before you become a Religious or a priest. Nobody shall take the step slightly. It must be a **total commitment**. Otherwise one would better not start. This lesson is demonstrated by two parables: Nabody would start building a tower (In Palestine often built in a vineyard to watch the vineyard and protect it against thieves and wild beasts) before he figuers out the exact cost. Everybody would laugh at the bullder, if the tower could not be finished. No king would dare making war or even less defend himself against an aggressing king who comes with a superior force numberwise unless he has sureness that his army is superior in expertise and weapons so that he can dare going to war. The risk to be smashed completely would be too great. It would be better to ask for an honorable peace treaty than to be forced to an unconditional surrender. — If we start our Christian life, our Religious or priestly life, without calculating the efforts and the cost, we may run the risk of becoming a fallen away Christian, Religious or priest. Then it

would be better to stay a good pagan or stay a good Christian and not become a Religious or a priest. Whatever we do we shall not do hastily but with deliberation.

6. For building one needs money; for waging a war, soldiers. But if one wants to follow Christ, not possession is needed, but renunciation. (1) We must be free from all external possessions, from "all possessions" (Lk 14:33) to have our hands free and not drag ballast along. (2) We must not be attached to any person but Christ. We must sacrifice human attachments: Father and mother, wife and child, brother and sister (Lk 14:26). (3) And what is even more, we must turn our back on our very self (Lk 14:26), we must give "our own life", abdicate our own free decisions and do only what God wants us to do. What we can keep is only the cross. We shall follow Christs crucified with total surrender. Rather not resolve upon exclusive service to Christ than go only half way. Half way is half renunciation. We shall not keep certain things to ourselves but demolish the bridges behind of us. Enthusiasm alone does not suffice. The sign of authentically is preparedness for complete denial in order to love only Christ. We give up everything for the sake of total surrender to Christ.

SEPTEMBER 14: TRIUMPH OF THE CROSS

In the Missal before Vatican II there were two feasts: on May 3 the Feast of the Discovery of the Cross. According to tradition empress Helena after the victory of her son Constantine (313 A.D.) found three crosses in Jerusalem in the year 320. In order to find out the true cross, all three were applied to a sick man who was then healed through the true cross. Helena built a basilica in Jerusalem and sent some particles of the true cross to Rome for the church in Rome named "Holy Cross in Jerusalem". — The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14 commemorated the triumphant return of the true cross through emperor Heraclius from the Persians in the year 628. The historical details of these events are not important. Thus the new liturgy celebrates just the exaltation of the cross, the exaltation of Christ through the cross and our own exaltation through the cross.

FIRST READING: NUMBERS 21:4b-9

This is an unusual and seemingly a little superstitious story. 2 Kgs 18:4 tells us that King Hezekiah "removed the high places, shattered the pillars, and cut down the sacred poles. He smashed the bronze serpent called Nehushtan which Moses had made,

because up to that time the Israelites were burning incense to it." The serpent was a well-known feature of the fertility cults in Canaan. People, especially farmers, believed that fertility in nature, animals, and men comes from Baal and Baalath; and to help along that fertility, people would have "sacred intercourse" with temple prostitutes in one of the sanctuaries of Baal or would have to worship him and his wife on high places and under pillars. It was the great danger for the monotheism against which all the prophets were fighting. And in the history of Israel there were ups and downs concerning the true worship of Yahweh. Bad kings would tolerate or even encourage such idolatrous worship, religious kings would abolish it. King Hezekiah was one of them who abolished it.

The narrative of Numbers 21:6-9 would seem to be formed and circulated in order to justify this cult-object of dubious nature. Jews would say: "What do you want, even Moses tolerated the use of such an object. So it cannot be all that bad."

As so often, the Hebrews complained against God in the desert. They preferred the security of slavery in Egypt to the insecurity of freedom in the desert and found a hundred and one reason for this. One was the monotony of food. As punishment God sent fiery serpents which bite the people so that many died. They are called "fiery", in Hebrew *sarah*, because of the burning effect of their poisonous bite. The Hebrews repented and asked Moses to put in a word for them with God to take the serpents away from them. The Lord ordered Moses to make a fiery serpent and mount it on a pole. Anybody who looked at it was healed from the bite of the snakes.

This could look like the superstitious belief that one could annul the power of dangerous creatures by making an image of them and offering some kind of worship to that image. So we find in I Samuel 6:4 how the Philistines try to avert the plaques of hemorrhoids and mice by offering five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice giving them as tribute to the God of Israel. But already Wisdom 16:5-7 explains very clearly that it was not image of the bronze serpent that healed but only the belief in Yahweh: "When the dire venom of beasts came upon them and they were dying from the bite of crooked serpents, your anger endured not to the end. . . For he who turned toward it (the sign of the bronze serpent) was saved, not by what he saw, but by you, the savior of all." Thus the faith in Yahweh healed the Israelites, not the bronze snake.

SECOND READING: PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

This pericope is a pre-Pauline Christological hymn, used in the early Christian community before Paul adapted it. Proofs for this are the fact that the hymn is poetry (Paul usually writes in prose), the different expression unusual for Paul: "Form of God," "equality with God," "slave," "empty himself," "bestow," and the Christological theology of pre-existence humiliation and exaltation, whereas Paul usually speaks about Christ's death and resurrection. Thus it is a precious document of how the first Christians looked at the cross and at Christ. The division of the hymn is discussed among scholars, but preferably we can distinguish two strophes: (1) Verses 2:6-8 speak about Christ's pre-existence, Incarnation, and crucifixion, (2) Verses 2:9-11 picture Christ's exaltation.

Christ was in the form of God from all eternity, equal with God, that means God. ("Form" is the same as "image" and means here more than what the mere term would express; it means true God.) Yet Christ did not consider his equality with God as something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and became a man. "Form" of a slave of a man, means again true man.) As one can see, the old hymn describes more negative viewpoint of Incarnation, the humiliation of Christ. He became man, but even more, he became a slave, dying for us on the cross, as usually only slaves did. But this was not a sign of the Father's cruelty, but a sign of Christ's obedient love.

Because of this obedience to the Father God highly exalted Christ. This "highly exalted" (in Greek *hyperypsoun*) is a rare expression, usually reserved to God, as in Ps 96:9. Christ does not only receive again the position he had before Incarnation, but he receives a dignity which takes his humiliation and obedience into account. The exaltation is interpreted as receiving a new name (cf. Rom 1:4) which implies that all men will worship him and all power subjects to him. ("In the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth" probably refers to representatives of the whole cosmos as the picture of the cosmos at that time had it, as we see in the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossian.) All adore Christ and proclaim him as Lord, that is God. After all, Yahweh is always rendered with "Lord" in the Septuagint.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: JOHN 3:13-17

In his discourse with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21) Jesus speaks about the new life of the children of God. We have to be born again. We acquire salvation by regeneration (baptism). This regeneration is generation from above, is the work of the Holy Spirit (3:3-8), is

brought about by means of faith in Jesus Christ who died for us (3:9-15). Love of God is the ultimate cause of our salvation (3:16-21).

John uses an unusual expression to express Christ's crucifixion: *hypsoo* — to exalt. In non-biblical Greek the expression is late and rare; it means "to lift up," to "raise on high," "to exalt" both literally and transferredly. In the Septuagint it occurs some two hundred times, is used for instance for God's exaltation or His throne (Ps 96:9; Jer 17:12), God's manifestation of his loftiness by intervening in the course of events (Is 2:11 17; 5:16; 12:4 6; 30:16; 33:10). The righteous constantly ask God for his revelation of His loftiness and exalt, God in the liturgy. God alone is exalted and can exalt and elevate man. This motif of exalting the lowly and humbling the lofty occurs also in the New Testament (Mt 23:12; Lk 14:11; 18:14). God alone exalts. — As we saw, in a pre-Pauline confession of Christ Phil 2:9 presents Christ's exaltation "cosmocrator" because of his obedient humiliation — in Act 2:33 and 5:31 exaltation stands alongside the common formula of the resurrection or awakening of Jesus: Christ is exalted by his resurrection and ascension.

Related but different and unique at the same time is the use of *hypsoo* in the fourth gospel: Christ is exalted by his crucifixion and his resurrection and ascension. There are three texts: (1) Jn. 3:14 (see above. (2) 8:28: "Jesus continued: 'When you lift up the Son of Man, you will come to realize that I am and that I do nothing by myself.'" (3) 12:32.24: "Jesus said: 'I — once I am lifted up from earth — will draw all men to myself.' This statement indicated the sort of death he had to die." What the Jews want to do with Christ is to bring him to the gallows, to pull him up unto the cross in the literal sense. In reality, however, they exalt him as the ruler and judge. Crucifixion is exaltation because it is the first part of resurrection and ascension, inseparably connected.

John applies the scene of Numbers 21:9 to Christ: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert (on a pole and all who looked at it with faith were healed) so must the Son of Man be lifted up that all who believe may have eternal life in him" (Jn 3:13-14). We are saved by faith in the crucified (and risen) Lord.

This crucifixion, however, was not a sign of God's demanding justice, even less of God's cruelty, but of God's love. Our salvation does not come from our efforts but from God. The Father sent

his Son into the world out of love, and the Son out of loving obedience died for us on the cross, thus not condemning the world but giving it eternal life. It all depends on our openness to accept it.

HOMILY

EXALTATION BY THE CROSS FOR CHRIST AND FOR US

1. The crucifixion was invented by the Persians, probably because the earth, dedicated to Ormuz, should not be profaned by the body of a sentenced person. Alexander the Great took it over, then the Diadochi, Punic, and Romans. In the Roman provinces crucifixion was one of the most important means to keep order and security. It was used against criminals, run-aways, and rebels. It was forbidden to use it for Roman citizens. It was the most cruel punishment. Cicero (*Pro Rabirio* 5,16) says: "The name of the cross should be absent not only from the body of Roman citizens but also from their thoughts, eyes, and ears."

The Jewish law did not know of crucifixion. It was prescribed in the Old Testament to suspend the bodies of sentenced, already dead idolaters and blasphemers. But that was no crucifixion but additional punishment after the lapidation of these persons and made them cursed men. Deut 21:23 says: "If anyone has committed a crime punishable by death, and has been put to death, and you have impaled him on a stake, his corpse must not remain all night on the stake; but you must be sure to bury him the same day; for an impaled man is a terrible disgrace, and you must not pollute the land which the Lord your God is giving as a heritage." Thus crucifixion was for pagans the most horrible punishment; for Jews, also a curse of God. Understandable therefore why the Jews wanted precisely this punishment for Jesus. They could stamp him as a failure and condemn him to these horrible pains of a crucifixion. The chest came in a position of inhalation, was extended abnormally much but could not breathe out. The system of breathing was disturbed and thus the blood circulation; cramps would spread over the whole body and the crucified person slowly would suffocate.

2. The normal reaction to such a horrible punishment we see in the garden of Gethsemani. The Lord has volunteered to die for us and take upon himself the sins of all mankind. But seeing that his death would be in vain for many, seeing the horror of sin, seeing vividly his suffering, he is sweating blood, because it

is just too much for him, and thus he prays: "Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). And his "sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Lk. 22:43). And again that same fear and agony overcame him on the cross so that he could pray: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mt. 27:46)?

3. And yet, Jesus would call his crucifixion, as we see it in the gospel of John, an exaltation, a being lifted up. A crucified person was literally lifted up: After he had been nailed while on the ground to the *patibulum* (the vertical part of the cross) he was pulled up to the *stipes* (the upright part of the cross) which usually remained standing on the place of execution and was used many times, and then the vertical part was fixed on or in the upright part of the cross so that the feet of the crucified would be about three feet above the ground. A horrible being lifted up, physically and psychologically. And yet the Lord calls it exaltation in the theological sense. Only with eyes of faith could he do that.

4. And he could call it exaltation because crucifixion implies inseparably also resurrection and ascension to heaven by which he would be installed as Lord of heaven and earth so that all people, angels and saints would adore him as the "cosmocrator" to whom is given the same authority as to Yahweh, the "I am who I am".

5. Christ's crucifixion is exaltation also because he died not because of a cruel will of God who demanded strict justice for the mankind so that Christ had to placate the wrath of the Father. On the contrary, just in the hour of greatest pain and agony, Christ would call God his Abba, his Papa: "Abba (Papa), you have the power to do all things. Take this cup from me. But let it be as you would have it, not as I" (Mk 14:36) we read in the parallel text to Matthew which we saw above. Christ's Incarnation was the sign of how much God loves us and even more Christ's crucifixion proves the Father's and the Son's love for us and thus exalts them both.

6. If we speak about the exaltation of Christ crucified it could be that for us the pains of the cross are not real because we never witnessed a crucifixion. For us the cross has become a piece of decoration of silver and gold so that the expression becomes just a phrase for us. And before we try to talk to others and try to tell them that crucifixion and suffering can and should be exaltation for us, we better know what we are talking about and know suffering from own experience. Otherwise the consolation sounds so unreal, as it is often when a completely healthy person, who was never sick, tries to console an incurably sick person.

7. If suffering comes our way, our first reaction will probably be the same as it was for Christ in the garden of Gethsemany or on the cross: We will feel forsaken by God. We will ask ourselves, what we did wrong that we have to suffer that much, why God is so angry with us.

To see the cross and our suffering as an exaltation which brings out our real love for the Lord, which helps to draw people to Christ when they see us suffering patiently and even with joy, takes strong faith.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (September 21, 1980)

The first reading and the gospel speak about the rich use of money and wealth and one could sum up both by saying: "Share your wealth!" — The second reading, as usual, has an independent theme: "Pray that all men may be saved!"

FIRST READING: AMOS 8:4-7

Amos is the earliest of the Old Testament prophets whose words have been preserved for us in book form. He was a peasant from Tekoa (Am 1:1), about six miles south of Bethlehem and was active in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of the contemporary kings, Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel (786-46) somewhere between 760 and 750 B.C.

Amos is the great Champion of social justice. His time was a period of great material wealth of some few rich people who had become rich partly because they oppressed the poor. These few rich people tried to console themselves and calm their conscience by elaborate religious ceremonies of worship and great pomp of sacrifices. But Amos could only tell them that Yahweh did and could not like their sacrifices coming from the top of their purse, not from the bottom of their heart. One can worship God truly and sincerely only if one can walk in somebody else's shoes, if one feels with the poor and helps them. Wealth has to be shared.

Today's first reading brings examples of how these rich people were cheating the poor and how external their piety was: They observed the Sabbath, yes, and also the New Moon Day (equal to the Sabbath). But they were just waiting till everything was over to be able to

sell again and do business, cheating business, for in selling grain to the poor these cunning merchants would use a small "pack" (a dry measure to measure what they gave, and a heavy weight to determine what they got. But Deut 25:13-16 clearly forbade such use of different weights and measures. These unscrupulous merchants would also acquire a man as a slave or take over his property for his debts (8:9). Yes, they would even sell the "refuse of what", the mixture of chaff and trash left after winnowing. To such swindling God could only say: "Never will I forget a thing they have done" (8:7).

SECOND READING: 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8

PRAY THAT ALL PEOPLE MAY BE SAVED!

The two letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus make up the Pastoral Letters, addressed to two of Paul's most faithful disciples, and are almost exclusively concerned with the organization and direction of the churches, founded by the Apostle. In style and vocabulary, too, they are quite different from the Pauline Letters.

In the First Letter Timothy is admonished to defend the faith against heresies (1:3-10 18-20; 4:1-11). He shall take care of worthy liturgical service (2:1-15), shall — after long examinations install bishop, presbyters and deacons (3:1-13; 5:17-25). He himself shall be a model (4:12-16) and take care of all states of life (5:1-6:2).

Speaking about public worship in 2:1-8 the Apostle singles out what we nowadays would call prayers of the faithful or general intercessions, and it is interesting to note, how old they are. St. Justin mentions them in chapter 67 of his First Apology to emperor Antoninus Pius (150 A.D.) as coming at the end of the celebration of the word. Christians shall pray for all men; that means in this contexts also for the pagans, not just for the fellow Christians, pray especially that all people shall be saved because this is the will of God (2:3).

We shall pray for kings and those in authority that we may live in peace. Such a request to Christians is interesting to note after some persecutions had already gone ahead (Nero 54-68; Domitian 81-96). Nobody could say that Christians are politically unreliable. The Church has always believed that one can live a good life better and easier in times of peace than in times of war and upheavals.

Our prayer is efficacious because Christ is our mediator (2:5). All people shall pray. But if men pray, it is even more impressive and contagious (2:8).

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 16:1-13

Today's pericope is proper to Luke and in some way strange. For it could seem that the Lord would recommend fraud and dishonesty. But only apparently. Lk. 16:1-8 tells the parable of the wily manager, and 16:9-13 is a collection of disparate sayings, joined together by catchwords giving a secondary application to the parable.

In Palestine were many absentee landlords who leased their land to stewards. Here in the parable one such landlord has been deceived by his steward who abused his confidence, squandering the master's possessions, and has to give an account that everything could be handed over to the steward's successor.

The steward had to act fast. The two normal ways of making a new livelihood were out of question for him: He was not able or too soft to work with his hands and to live on charity he was too proud. Thus a brilliant idea crossed his mind: by falsifying the books of his master he would put his master's debtors under a lasting obligation to himself. The two examples mentioned in the parable are only mentioned as examples. The debtors could be tenant who owed rent to be paid in kind, or the huge amount of debt mentioned could suggest that the debtors were merchants who had bought the produce of the estate on a promisory note.

Some few commentators think that this steward did nothing irregular by falsifying the books, reasoning that the steward was not a paid factor or broker but that he fully represented his master to the extent that the latter must honor his agent's transactions. If the agent were to swindle his master, no legal action could be taken against him to recover the loss. He could be punished only by reproaches, loss of character and dismissal. After he had received notice of dismissal, the steward had to give an account of the state of the property. And until he had submitted it, the steward remained in office, legally authorized to act in his master's name.

But it is more likely he was a real rascal. V.8a is more likely the conclusion which Christ, the master, draws than the owner of the state. Only grudgingly or sarcastically a cheated owner could praise a deceiver of this kind. Also in Lk 18:6 we have such a change from the master of the parable to Christ who told the parable. Christ thus draws the conclusion from the parable. The steward was unjust before his being called to account. But what he did afterwards was prudent, shrewd: By ingratiating the debtors, he would make sure that they would take him into their houses

after his dismissal. It is too bad that worldly people are much more efficient and working harder to accomplish worldly goals than the other-worldly people are in trying to accomplish their heavenly goals. And it should be the other way around.

Vv. 9-13 bring another secondary conclusion or conclusions to the parable, however in line with it, originally being a collection of disparate sayings, connected by catchwords like "mammon", "faithful", "unrighteous". One conclusion is: As the steward with the possessions of his master made friends for himself by being generous to them, we shall share our possessions with the poor to make friends (16:9). — Money is called "little things", "unrighteous mammon" since it often has the connotation of having been acquired unjustly, "something which is another's"; whereas the care for the other-worldly things is called "much", "true riches", "our own". The truth is: If we are unfaithful in the administration (and here the steward is no model any more, but somebody not to be imitated) of money, God can entrust us even less the administration of that what is real (and that can in the context not be heaven, because we do not administer heaven) but preaching the word of God. — And the last conclusion of it all: Nobody can serve two masters: God and money. This is of course only true for a slave (and we are God's slaves) who has to serve his master the whole day. The search for money also-occupies the mind of a person so much that there is hardly any attention left for God.

HOMILY

SHARE YOUR WEALTH

1. Possessions we all have, few or many. Do we use them planfully, for a good purpose, for the honor of God and for the good of our neighbor? The steward of the parable today squandered the possessions of his master. In one way or the other most of us also squander our possession. How often do poorer people save money to spend it all in one day or in one night, or on one fiesta, for instance, instead of saving something for many occasions throughout the year. Is it really done for the honor of God or rather because of some social pressure or of fear to otherwise lose face because we would be considered too poor? How many a party is thrown not because we have the money but because we live beyond our means.

How much food do we waste? It starts already with small children. As mother often used to say: "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach." And she tried to insist that we should eat what

we put on our plate. Anything else would be waste. We cannot say: "It's our food with which we can do whatever pleases us." God has given us the food. And what we do not use somebody else would gladly use.

That list of waste is rather long and becomes more sophisticated, the higher the position of a person is. How much money is wasted with wrongly built bridges and highways, houses and schools, objects which we considered as indispensable but do not use much or not any more as soon as we have them, like portable radios, tape recorders, cameras.

2. Possessions can be acquired in a dishonest way. Amos had to blame his contemporaries for this again and again. The rich people would use all kinds of tricks to enrich themselves: Use different weights when buying (a big one) and when selling (a small one). Who has not heard about double bookkeeping, different prices for different customers, lengthening the drinks and the food with something cheaper, selling cars for more than they are worth;

3. What about the salaries we give to our employees? The contemporary masters of Amos could buy a poor man for a pair of sandals (Amos 8:6); since the poor man could not pay the pair of sandals, he sold himself into slavery. We are not that bad. But are our salaries at least the minimum wage? Or do we have a double bookkeeping making the employees sign a fair salary contract, whereas in reality they get less salary because they have no choice: They either take the sub-standard salary or they do not get anything.

4. The contemporaries of Amos by and large were pious, observing the Sabbath, offering sacrifices. But in many cases, it was a mere external observance and just a superstitious handle to force God (so they believed) to bless their dubious and immoral commercial enterprises. — what are our motives in going to Church? Is it just a good custom, something we cannot miss without losing face, something by which we can oblige God? External piety is not enough, going to Church is not just an exercise for the Sunday which we forget during the week and during the day.

5. The Lord was not pleased with the worship of the Israelites mainly because their horizontal relationship (with their neighbors) was not intact. They would oppress them, as we saw, and whatever they gave for God and their fellowmen did not come from the bottom of their hearts but from the top of their purse. It would not hurt them. We must give till it hurts. And God will not be satisfied earlier. We must give being willing to go and walk in somebody else's shoes to understand him.

6. Money, possessions are called mammon, a concept which somehow involves the idea of gotten in a certain unfair and unjust way; even if somebody acquired it in an honest way, all too often a certain dishonesty is not far away. This idea and the other that the acquisition of possessions, of wealth, requires the whole attention and energy of a person is the reason for the statements: "Nobody can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or be attentive to the one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and to money (Lk. 16:13). We nowadays would be tempted to say, "But of course, most of us serve two masters or even three, doing one job during the day in one and another job at night in another place." Some may even manage to be teacher in two different schools, or teacher in one and principal in another. But at the time of Jesus, slaves were in the services of their master totally, i.e. for twenty-four hours. They had no free time for another occupation or master. God is such a master for us. And the longing for money is such another master who requires our whole attention. Often enough we are fooling ourselves, thinking that we are different and that we can look after money without making it our idol. But idolatry it is just the same.

7. It is true, already early Christians must have thought that we can be stewards of possessions and money, and all we have to do is, not to give everything completely away (that will be only for a few who follow Christ in evangelical poverty), but to be faithful in "these small things" (what are millions of pesos in comparison to everlasting life), these "things which are not ours" but God's, in these "unreal things". And only then, when we are faithful in the administration of these small things, God can entrust us bigger things to administer, the word of God and all the other visible signs of God's grace, gaining us everlasting life.

8. The safer way, however, of being a faithful steward of our possessions, and probably in most or at least in many cases is to share our wealth. And this is a favorite idea of Luke. Whatever we spent, is gone, whatever we keep, we loose, and whatever we gave to the poor, goes ahead of us as good friend recommending us to the Lord. And yet we all know from experience how hard it is to do so. We have hundred and one reason why we think we need our possessions so badly for many projects.

9. Yes, the other-worldly people are often just so slow in moving ahead, slow in getting new ideas, have no zip and no pep, are not applying themselves hard enough. They could learn a lot from the worldly people: how inventive they are in finding new programs, do not hesitate in making sacrifices and work hard and are shrewd. After all, the kingdom of heaven suffers force and only those who use force will enter.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

(September 28, 1980)

In today's liturgy we are told: "Do not let riches lull you into false security (gospel and first reading). Rather be open to the word of God (gospel) and keep the commandments of the Lord till he returns (second reading)." By chance, therefore, the second reading can be linked with the other two readings.

FIRST READING: AMOS 6:1a. 4-7

We saw already last Sunday how the prophet Amos talked about social justice, how the few rich people had become rich to a great extent by oppressing the poor and how they tried to appease their conscience by external worship and piety; whereas their heart was far from the Lord, since they did not care for the poor. Today's reading gives a vivid description of this affluent society in Israel at that time; They are very self-confident (6:1), blinded by their wealth. And thus they do not hear the predictions of a "day of disaster", the "day of Yahweh". These men are doing too well creating misfortune for others even to consider the possibility of digging their own grave. Thus they give themselves to licentiousness and rivalry. They have the most expensive furniture, succulent food, enjoy the sound of music. Every item represents a luxury that had been possible in earlier times only for the wealthy and remained a world apart from the life of the simple people in the villages. "Ivory beds" are couches whose frames are inlaid with ivory designs. Lambs and staled calves are choice animals fed and finished as delicacies in a culture where eating any meat at all was exceptional. The custom in Israel had been to sit on rugs or seats when eating. The practice of reclining for meals is mentioned here for the first time, a foreign innovation. The expression "improvise" in v. 3 is uncertain, but probably means "sing extemporaneously". They drink wine with great howls. And only the finest oil will do for their anointing.

All this is a picture of an upper class that is very self-centered and looking for its own pleasure. The guilt of this indolence lies in the fact that these rich people have not the slightest concern for the breakdown of Joseph (= Israel). The suffering of the oppressed and wronged in Israel do not touch them. They neither see nor hear their brothers, although Yahweh had made himself known to

the Hebrews in Egypt as one who heard their cry and knew their sufferings (Ex. 3:7). This same Yahweh cannot bear this rivalry. Therefore the leaders of today shall go into exile tomorrow (722 B.C.).

SECOND READING: 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-16

The last part of the first letter to Timothy, starting with 6:3, contains different admonitions, which one can hardly arrange into a systematic order. I. Timothy 6:11-16 is an independent parenetical piece, not much connected with the preceding nor with the following context. And there is a doxology at the end. Thus it probably was already a separate unit before it was placed into the letter. It's a challenge to Timothy. He has been baptized, but even more, he has ordained. And in both cases there was a confession of faith. Especially during ordination he promised to be faithful and to fight the good fight of faith. Just as Jesus once was bearing witness before Pontius Pilate, telling the whole truth, even if this meant death for him, Timothy shall tell the whole truth and keep the faith pure and intact, even if heretics try to change parts of it. He shall keep the commandments without blame till the Lord returns for his parousia. Christ is the only Lord, the king of kings; not the Roman emperor, like Domitian, who tried to usurpe that title for himself. To Christ alone shall be honor and everlasting rule.

Virtues, which Timothy is asked to practice in particular, are: (1) integrity righteousness, characteristic of a man who does his duty to God and his fellow men; (2) piety (godliness), by which a man never ceases to live in the presence of God; (3) faith (fidelity), by which a man is loyal to God; (4) love, which helps a man never to forget what God has done for him; (5) steadfastness (patience), which is victorious endurance, and (6) gentle spirit (gentleness) which helps a man not to get angry.

READING OF THE GOOD NEWS: LUKE 16:19-31

Today's pericope is again proper to Luke, consisting of two parts: the parable which describes the lot of the rich and the poor, where the roles are changed, and the unexpected conclusions at the end where the man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to earth to warn his five brothers.

Jesus may have used a familiar Egyptian folk-tale which contrasted the fate in the nether world of two men, one wealthy and

one poor, which introduced into Palestine by an Alexandrian Jew became the story of the poor scribe and the wealthy tax collector Bar Majan. The picture of the people in Sheol after death is also drawn from traditional Jewish sources, e.g., Book of Enoch 22. But Jesus did not want to give a strict doctrine of the afterworld. In a picture story he wanted to talk to us about the danger of riches; they can give us a false security and may make us miss the challenge of the hour as it happened to the rich farmer (Lk 12:13-21). This parable here adds the thought: Tables will be turned: a poor man on earth will be rich in heaven, a rich man on earth will be poor in the afterlife.

Not much is said about the moral life of the two men. It is not said that the rich was maltreating Lazarus, or that he was cruel. And nothing is said explicitly that Lazarus was bearing his lot with great patience and resignation in God's will. But we certainly cannot take just a mere mechanical change of lots of the two either. Riches made the rich man unsensitive to God's will and overlooking the needs of Lazarus, and vice-versa the material poverty and affliction made Lazarus poor in spirit, open to God. And thus the reversal of conditions in the life hereafter is for the rich a punishment, which he acknowledges, and for Lazarus a reward.

The rich man had everything he wanted: He was dressed in purple and linen, usually only robes for the priest. He feasted splendidly (the expression *euphrainomenos* used here usually signifies gluttony), every day. His sin was not that he maltreated Lazarus, that he chased him away from his door, that he kicked him. No, he just never noticed him, he accepted him as part of the Landscape. It never dawned on him that there was somebody in need and he could have made him his friend so easily (cf. Lk 16:9) who would have remembered him in the life hereafter.

Lazarus on the other side was so sick, covered with sores that he could not move, could not even chase away the pestering dogs, licking his sores. Nobody gave him any food, and he could not get up to help himself to the hunks of bread with which the wealthy people would clean their hands after the meal and throw them away under the table.

After death, tables were turned. The rich man came to Sheol (the place for good and bad people alike till the doctrine of reward was more clearly defined shortly before Christ). The story here is taken from a time on the way to a clearer distinction, since there are already two departments in Sheol and nobody can go to the

other side; and furthermore, the fate of the rich man bears clearly the features of punishment and thus our real Lazarus, however, has the place of honor (this is what the expression "to the bosom of Abraham" (Lk 16:22) means (cf. Jn 13:23).

And now comes the unexpected twist of the parable. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus down to earth to warn his five brothers that they will not be caught by surprise as he was and go to hell also. A seemingly unselfish request. But Abraham refuses it: They have Moses and the prophets, i.e. the word of God which tells them what to do. And to be tuned in to God's word is all somebody needs. A miracle, not even a resurrection from the death, would convince a man who does not listen to God's word. Christ also refused to give the Jews a sign. The only sign given, the resurrection would not have convinced them either. And this may reason why the Lord did not appear to those who did not believe in him.

HOMILY

DO NOT LET RICHES MAKE YOU INSENSITIVE — BUT LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD!

1. Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) the famous European theologian and musician, turned his back on his very successful career and became a missionary doctor in Gabon. He had concluded that he was the rich man and Africa the poor man. So he wrote on the opening page of his *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*: "Just as Dives (the rich man) sinned because for want of heart he never put himself in his place and let his conscience tell him what to do, so we sin against the poor at our gate."

2. We meditated already several times on the use of material possessions. As such they are neutral and it depends on us what we do with them. And yet we have seen several times how hard it is to use them without being attached to them. The readings of today bring us pictures of such luxurious living which becomes scandalous because the poor people are bypassed and even abused, or at least just overlooked. And yet, how many rich people will admit that they are living a luxurious life. We have a hundred and one reason why we think we need this and that particular item for working better and more effectively, we have to have a certain kind of food and drink to be able to live longer. We easily rationalize: What was rich or luxurious yesterday has become normal standard

today and thus there is nothing wrong in having it. Or we tell ourselves: In my home country or place this is normal standard of an average person, why should I deprive myself of it here? People will have to adapt themselves to me, not I to them.

3. Wealth can give us a false security. We get the feeling that we can do things ourselves, that we lastly do not need God really. Slowly we get wrapped up in planning for bigger projects. We lose sight of upcoming crises as the contemporaries of Noah did, when Noah even warned the people, but they would just laugh at him. Amos was not so successful in warning the rich of his time. The rich man of the parable was equally surprised when death came and all his security was gone in one moment.

4. Great wealth can also easily close our eyes to the needs of others. The sin of the rich man was not so much a sin of commission, but a sin of omission. He was not really malicious, he did not maltreat Lazarus. For him Lazarus practically did not exist. He just did not see him. Probably he would have been mightily surprised if some body would have told him about the beggar lying at his door who would be in dire need of care and a little love. How many people in need do we overlook not with bad intention but just because we are too busy with ourselves, with our planning, with our work and feasting. Luke has the same thought when the priest and levite did not help the man fallen prey to the robbers: He did not help because he went on the other side and passed by. He acted as if he would not see (Lk 10:32-33). And Mt 25:31-46 shows that during the last judgment we are judged by our concern or unconcern for our brothers, if we saw them and recognized them or not.

5. Wealth can also make us insensitive to God's word. And yet somebody is great only if he listens to the word of God and does it (Lk 11:28). Too late, the rich man realized this as his mistake, but wanted to warn his five brothers through Lazarus. Would he come back from the dead, the rich man's brothers certainly would repent and mend their ways. But Abraham would not agree with this idea, nor would Jesus. What we need here on earth are not signs, miracles, extraordinary events, private revelations, but the basic facts of salvation contained in Scripture and our openness to the word of God. And yet, how often do we look for sensational things, are disappointed and lame when the newness of something wears off. How many are disappointed with Vatican II that it did not bring the hoped for results.

400 BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

To work for something for a short time is relatively easy. Jacob had to serve seven years for his wife Rebekah. And yet, "they seemed to him but a few days, because of his love for her" (Gen 29:20). The first Christians were looking forward to the parousia and this longing made them do their best. But when the Lord delayed his second coming, the first fervor disappeared, and Paul and Peter and the other Apostles could only warn them to be attentive to the word of God.

6. He who seeks the truth can find it. And slowly and steadily we make our decisions so that at the end our final decision becomes irrevocable, because we die in an irrevocable state of mind, being open to God or closed, thus going to heaven or hell. The way we lived, the way we know it, it may be our final decision.