

HOMILETICS

by

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I. BIBLICAL NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

(September 4, 1977)

First Reading: Wisdom 9:13-19

Second Reading: Philemon 9b-10.12-17

Gospel Reading: Luke 14: 25-33

First Reading: These verses are taken from a prayer composed by the author and placed on the lips of Solomon of old, in line with his prayer asking God for wisdom in 1 Kgs. 3:6-9. It contrasts the greatness of the all-knowing God with weak, timid man. His spirit often aspires to accomplish great things, but he is weighed down by his "flesh". He scarcely can acquire proper knowledge of things on earth, much less of heavenly realities. But with God's Wisdom and God's Spirit guiding him, all is well; he will learn true wisdom and reach his destined goal.

Gospel Reading: Turning to the great crowd that had gathered about him, Jesus spoke clearly of the requisites for following him. These can be grouped under three headings: 1) Love of Jesus must prevail over love of kin, no matter how close the relationship (v. 26). 2) It must prevail over love of self and even one's own life (vv. 26b-27). 3) It must prevail over one's love for material goods (v. 33). Two parables are placed between the second and the third requisite, which illustrate all three, namely, discipleship is no small matter. Mature deliberation is required to accomplish it, and willingness at all times to meet the requirements. One must count the cost and have a courageous spirit of constant sacrifice. The cost is the sacrifice of love of kin, of self, and of material goods, whenever they stand in the way of love of Christ.

The "tower" can only be a watch-tower erected by the common people in the vineyard with a double purpose: 1) to serve as shelter in time of harvest, 2) an observation point to thwart the

attempts of thieves and prowling animals. To build one sufficiently high and strong may take up a good deal of the common man's resources. Again, petty kings were frequently at war with one another. Mature deliberation would be required to compute the expenses of an expedition, otherwise one risks defeat and frustration.

Second Reading: The shortest of Paul's letters contains a lesson of great depth. Onesimus, guilty of theft (v. 18) and runaway slave of Philemon, a wealthy citizen of Colossae, is converted by Paul in prison. Paul would have liked to retain him as a helper but recognized Philemon's rights over him, for slavery was part of the social stratum of the day; so he sent him back to him, calling him his son, and requesting Philemon to receive him back as a brother, a Christian. The request reveals both deep love as well as prudent tact on the part of Paul, and he lays the foundation for the Christian view on slavery in his actions.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **(September 11, 1977)**

First Reading: Exodus 32:7-11.13-14

Second Reading: First Timothy 1: 12-17

Gospel Reading: Luke 15: 1-32 (or: 1-10)

First Reading: The power of prayer is admirably exemplified in Moses, the friend of God and mediator of his sinful people, who have fallen into idolatry, thus defying the Lord and defaulting from the one true God. Notice that the Lord does not even call them his own people anymore, for he intends to reject them. In utter self-forgetfulness, Moses pleads for his people by reminding the Lord of all he had done already to deliver them, and of his oath to their forefathers. His prayer wins the day.

Gospel Reading: Three parables are brought together revealing the divine compassion for the wayward sinner.

1. **The lost sheep:** a picture of a typical Palestinian shepherd with a good-sized flock all his own. Each morning he leads them to pasture and back again in the evening. Pasture land is often hard to find, and the sheep, being somewhat scattered, are apt to be allured by hidden plots of green, and then get lost. A true shepherd feels the loss of even one of his sheep and spares no effort until he finds it, though it means leaving the rest of the flock meantime to a trusted friend. When found, no angry word,

no punishment is meted out to the bleating, frightened sheep, only compassion. Gently he lifts it to his shoulders and presses it to his check. The sheep is safe, the shepherd is glad, and so are his boon companions.

In the lesson Jesus reveals the joy, of heaven when sinful man returns to his God. Since everyone is in need of repentance the "righteous" can only mean the self-righteous in their own eyes. They are not pleasing to God.

2. **The lost coin:** A household scene of the poor in Palestine. The coin represents a day's wage and meant much to the poor peasant. Sometimes, these coins are made into a necklace, and if one is lost, the necklace cannot be used. Only a very diligent search regains the lost coin, and the woman's joy is so great that she shares it with her neighbors. Jesus concludes with the same lesson as before: God pursues with great love the heart that has wandered from him. It is his property, his ornament; his one wish is to regain it, for it is of priceless value in his eyes.

3. **The repentant (prodigal) son:** Explained in detail on the Fourth Sunday of Lent (Bol. Ecl., Jan.-Feb. 1977, pp. 102-104).

Second Reading: An outpouring of gratitude on Paul's part for his apostolic calling, despite his once having been a bitter persecutor of Jesus. He became an object of divine compassion because he had acted in ignorance and was motivated by false zeal. Acknowledging the immense favors accorded him, he sees clearly that before God all men are sinners and in need of the Savior, Paul himself needing him above all. Others will take courage and find their way to God in view of what happened to him. This mystery of God's mercy makes Paul break out in adoration and praise.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **(September 18, 1977)**

First Reading: Amos 8: 4-7

Second Reading: First Timothy 2: 1-8

Gospel Reading: Luke 16: 1-13 (or: 10-13)

First Reading: Amos, as God's mouthpiece, excoriates the wealthy merchants for their total disregard of social justice. They can hardly wait till the feasts of rest are over so they can ply again their grossly dishonest business and shameful transactions. He inveighs against them not as a sociologist but as the bearer of

God's word. Israel's sins constitute rebellion against God who has made man in his image, and expects man to show mercy and loving kindness to the poor and defenceless, as he had shown to Israel.

"Ephah" is a dry measure and "shekel" a unit of weight and also a coin of this weight. It is difficult to see how the Lord would swear by the pride of Jacob if that refers to Jacob's arrogance; rather it refers to himself as the true Pride of Jacob. Israel's sins cannot go unpunished.

Gospel Reading: In this parable of the shrewd manager, the picture is this:

a. **Called to account:** a wealthy landlord controlled the country far and wide, with tenants renting the land and paying off the yearly rents in produce instead of cash. According to prevailing custom, the management of the estate was entirely in the hands of a head-manager, who leased the farms to growers of olives and grain, collected the rents, and took care of the accounts without the owner himself dealing with those matters. But carelessness, bad management or dishonesty resulted in considerable losses for the master, and eventually the bad state of affairs is brought to his attention. The manager is called to account. His silence admits his guilt. He is told to bring the account books. Dismissal is at hand.

b. **Unusual shrewdness:** In these straits the manager shows great cleverness. He is unaccustomed to hard manual labor, and unfit for it: Begging is abhorrent; one thing remains: he will ingratiate himself with the tenants and feather his own bed before dismissal goes into effect. He still has the account-books, so in haste he calls the tenants one after the other. He reduces their standing debt either by dishonesty, or, (according to some authors) by knocking off his own share of the produce of that year, which was coming to him as wages. In either case they are "indebted" to him, and in turn, take good care of him after dismissal.

c. **Appraisal of the landlord:** He is struck by the man's cleverness to provide for himself, and is forced to admit that he acted with much foresight, when it came to his own advantage.

From this cleverness in providing for himself with the goods of this world Jesus draws the lesson. His followers, the children of light, ought to employ similar shrewdness and forethought in providing for their eternal welfare. Even material goods can pave the way to the Kingdom of God if used properly, especially in helping the poor. Money cannot be taken along into eternity, but if put to proper use on earth, it can insure a welcome in eternity.

To offset any misunderstanding concerning the meaning of the parable, Luke adds telling words of Jesus about honesty, and fidelity in small matters. Moreover, if a man cannot be trusted with someone else's goods, will he be any more reliable with his very own? Finally, a last short parable pits money against God and warns that one cannot be totally dedicated to both at the same time.

Second Reading: A plea for public prayer for all men, emphasized by use of four expressions, four being the symbol of the universe. Those in authority should receive greater attention, so they will let man serve God in peace. God made all men, and Christ is the Mediator who died for all. Therefore it is the divine will that all be saved, a clear statement of great theological importance. Paul urges public prayer in the spirit of brotherly love, in order that the will of God be accomplished, and not frustrated by man's abuse of his free will.

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME **(September 25, 1977)**

First Reading: Amos 6: 1a.4-7

Second Reading: First Timothy 6: 11-16

Gospel Reading: Luke 16: 19-31.

First Reading: The prophet Amos castigates the wanton luxury of the Northern Kingdom (called Joseph because consisting chiefly of descendants of the two sons of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh). They give no thought whatsoever to the evil conditions existing in the land. (Assyrian) exile is their doom.

Gospel Reading: A parable on true values. The picture is like a scene on the stage:

a. **In this life:** Two actors:

1) A wealthy Epicurean in fine clothes, banqueting daily sumptuously, with no thought of God or his Law concerning a share to be given to the poor (Is. 58:7), no heart for the desperately needy at his door, selfish and self-centered.

2) Lazarus, a beggar in need, famished and diseased, helpless and forsaken, with not even enough strength to keep away the mongrels from his sores; yet, evidently trusting in the Lord as his name Lazarus signifies: God is my help.

b. **In the after life:** the tables are turned. Three actors.

1) Lazarus: ended are his hunger and misery; he enjoys the express favor of heaven (borne away by angels) and perfect contentment (symbolized by "resting on Abraham's bosom").

2) The rich man: relegated to torments of fire and thirst in Sheol; painfully realizes his pamperings and enjoyments are at an end; great remorse at seeing the happiness of the beggar Lazarus.

3) Abraham: refuses even a drop of water to be brought by Lazarus to the once wealthy man now turned beggar! With death, the lot of man is fixed (vv. 25f). Refuses to send extra help to his brothers, because the revealed word of God is sufficient if heeded. Refuses an extra-ordinary shake-up for his brothers, like a return of someone from the dead, because he who neglects the ordinary means of salvation, will not be affected even by an apparition from the dead.

The lesson is clear: Wealth does not indicate man's true worth before God. True values are in the heart and not in external appearance. A despicable beggar may be God's favorite. Moreover, heaven must be won by the means at one's disposal, in the span of one's lifetime. There is no re-incarnation! Let the rich use well their riches, and let the poor trust in the Lord, bearing their lot patiently, if no human help is available. If ordinary means of salvation are neglected, no miracle will suffice to change a man's heart. This is exactly what happened when the proud and the rich in Israel refused to accept the proclamation that Christ had risen from the dead and was their sole means of salvation.

Second Reading: Paul depicts the Christian ideal for Timothy, dedicated as he is to God. He will welcome the challenge of the battle against evil, and carry out faithfully the commitment promised in baptism. Like Christ before Pilate, he is to bear witness to the truth, and he is charged to keep intact the whole deposit of faith until the Savior comes in glory. The thought of the Parousia of Christ makes Paul break out jubilantly into a doxology of praise of Christ as King, Lord, and God.

BIBLICAL NOTES FOR OCTOBER

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 2, 1977)

First Reading: Habakkuk 1:2-3: 2:2-4

Second Reading: Second Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 17: 5-10

First Reading: The prophet Habakkuk, living during the years immediately preceding the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., is intensely occupied with the problem of evil. Evil was rampant in the Kingdom both from internal corruption and because of enemy oppression. Daringly he asks God how he can allow things to go on like that for his chosen People. The Lord answers that, although he is long-suffering and patient, evil will most surely be punished one day, while the just man who is steadfast in his fidelity to God, despite surrounding evils, will be rewarded with enduring life. St. Paul sees a deeper meaning here: it is faith in Christ that obtains for man true supernatural life.

Gospel Reading: Speaking in figurative language, Jesus points out that the smallest spark of faith can accomplish what mere human endeavors can never attain. The importance of man's accomplishments are not to be overstressed. Jesus proceeds to show his apostles that as God's servants in his vineyard, they are expected to do his will, and he is not indebted to anyone for the work he is doing. The servant's duties are to serve the master, and he can expect no special thanks for doing his duty. So too, the fundamental disposition of God's servants is humble service, for that is expected of them. However, it is not that the servant is useless or unprofitable, as some translations have it. The servant in the picture is neither useless nor unprofitable. Jesus means that we are to remember that we are but servants, and we should always know our place.

Second Reading: By the imposition of Paul's hands, Timothy had received a special outpouring of the Spirit, making him a minister of Christ. He was thus enabled to bear witness to Christ courageously and with great love although by nature he may have been somewhat timid. Timothy is exhorted to let himself be renewed in that same Spirit, so as to preach the Good News faithfully as entrusted to him by Paul, and to suffer loyally for Christ's sake. That is the mark of true discipleship.

**TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
(October 9 1977)**

First Reading: Second Kings 5: 14-17
Second Reading: Second Timothy 2: 8-13
Gospel Reading: Luke 17: 11-19

First Reading: Only after the pagan Naaman had obeyed the prophet in Israel, and performed the sevenfold washing in the Jordan out of sheer faith in the word of the prophet of Yahweh, was he healed of his leprosy. He then loudly professes his faith in Yahweh. His request to take back soil for sacred purposes merely reflects his esteem for the land which the true God had so favored, similarly as Christians request soil from the Holy Land for sacred purposes.

Gospel Reading: Again there is a test of faith as in the case of Naaman. Only after the test is met are the ten lepers cured. Jesus commands them first to obey the law concerning lepers who had been cured. It is in carrying out this command that they are cured. Nine of them were Jews and one belonged to the mixed and despised race of the Samaritans. The nine took God's favor for granted as coming to Abraham's offspring. The stranger did not. He returned with genuine gratitude and expressed it profusely. The reaction of Jesus registers surprise and disappointment at the ingratitude of the nine. Many ask for favors from God but few return thanks to him on receiving them.

Second Reading: Christ's resurrection is the central theme of Paul's preaching, and his strongest motivation for suffering. If he is unable to continue preaching, others will do so. But suffering he welcomes, for it brings salvation to all who are chosen. Dying with Christ must be experienced throughout the life of a Christian, but the end is eternal glory in resurrection. That goal, however, will not be reached unless we are faithful in all trials to the end. To deny Christ in our trials on earth will merit rejection by Christ in the end-kingdom.

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
(October 16, 1977)**

First Reading: Exodus 17: 8-13
Second Reading: Second Timothy 3: 14 to 4:2
Gospel Reading: Luke 18: 1-8

First Reading: A nomadic tribe tries to hinder Israel's passage through the wilderness. To oppose God's People is to oppose God,

so Yahweh fights for his People. Yet it was not the fighters who won the victory for Israel, but Moses the friend of God who spent the entire day in supplication and prayer, marking him as the mediator between God and his People. His hands were held in the form of a cross, prefiguring the final victory of Christ over the archenemy of God's People by his salvific death.

Gospel Reading: Perseverance in prayer despite obstacles is graphically brought home by today's parable. The scene unfolds thus:

a. An unscrupulous judge, who cared nothing for God's laws sat in court. He had lost all regard for human opinion and was bent only on his own gain.

b. To such a grim arbiter a widow betakes herself in desperate need. She is helpless, being a poor widow, she has no bribe to offer, or can she show any advantage to the judge for taking up her case. But she demands the justice of the law, because her adversary seemingly reduced her to her present need. But at first the widow receives no satisfaction at all and the case seems hopeless. Determined to win her case, the widow returns again and again to importune the judge with her demands.

c. Tired of her incessant clamoring, the godless judge takes up her case just to get rid of her, and gives her full redress. So the widow won her case without any other means but persistent appeals.

A parable consists in a prolonged comparison. Its lesson must be drawn from the point of the comparison. Here it is the ceaseless importuning of the helpless one that obtains desired results despite delays and other obstacles encountered. The lesson is evident. If a godless judge can be moved by ceaseless importuning, all the more will the all-just God be moved by the pleas of his elect. In every tribulation let the faithful be steadfast in confident prayer. In his own time God will surely hear their plea.

Second Reading: Paul exhorts Timothy to remain faithful to the teaching received (tradition) and to the Scriptures, which culminate in Christ, the object of our faith and the source of all salvation. All Scripture is of divine origin, for it was written by men under the special influence of the Holy Spirit. Its purpose is sacred: to make man holy and equip him for his sacred calling. In solemn terms, Paul reminds Timothy of his serious obligation to proclaim the Good News. He is not to be deterred from this task by any and glorious King are the powerful motives used by Paul to exhort Timothy to his task.

**THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
(October 23, 1977)**

First Reading: Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 35: 15b-17.20-22a

Second Reading: Second Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18

Gospel Reading: Luke 18: 9-14

First Reading: The Lord is an all-just God. Though the weak and lowly may at times be cruelly oppressed and neglected by man, God is their advocate and will defend their cause. God's true servants humbly realize that God alone is their Savior, and their persevering prayer will always win out, for God loves justice and hates wickedness.

Gospel Reading: For self-righteous people who despised everyone else Jesus told today's parable. It develops in three scenes:

a. **Two types of men at prayer:** In the Temple-court two men are praying: one represents the self-righteous, the other represents one who is aware of his wretchedness. The former is punctilious in all legal observances, but is woefully lacking in proper interior dispositions; the latter broke the law often by defrauding and cheating, but, being more in contact with life's miseries, he is more aware of man's true self and his great need of God.

b. **Prayer contrasted:** 1) Choosing a conspicuous place to be seen by all, the Pharisee pretends to thank God but in reality is merely boasting that he is better than anybody else, and he despises them all. 2) Choosing a humble position, the tax-collector both in word and deed gives sign of genuine contrition, openly admits his wrong-doing, compares himself with no one, and appeals in his misery to the infinite mercy of God.

c. **Christ's approval:** Only the tax-collector won God's favor, not the proud, boasting Pharisee.

It is clear from the lesson that self-complacency about one's works does not bring down God's blessing and favor. All men are sinful and need God's mercy. To recognize and admit this brings one close to God. The Pharisee was utterly unaware of his wretchedness. God's law is chiefly concerned with man's interior dispositions. Re-echoing the Lord's final word, St. James exclaims: "God resists the proud but bestows his favor on the lowly" (Jam. 4:6).

Second Reading: Paul describes his imminent death as a sacrificial offering giving worship to God and salvation to men. He has been true to his commission given him by the Lord. His reward is with the Lord who also rewards all who live the Christ-life till he comes. Abandoned by human help in the first hearing (of the

second trial, or possibly the first trial), Paul won his case, assisted by the Lord himself. He was thus enabled to bear witness to the Good News still more: either in subsequent journeys after the first trial, or before all the pagan judges present in the second trial. Paul is referring to his being released from earth's trials and entering the heavenly abode.

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (October 30, 1977)

First Reading: Wisdom 11:23 to 12:2

Second Reading: Second Thessalonians 1:11 to 2:2

Gospel Reading: Luke 19: 1-10

First Reading: A beautiful passage depicting 1) God's infinite greatness. In comparison, the entire universe is but a tiny grain used for a weight in the scales, or like a tiny drop of dew. What a terrific contrast! 2) God's infinite mercy, which proceeds: a) from his all-mighty power; knowing the weakness of little man, he overlooks man's fallings; b) from his infinite love. In love he created every least being, and he cares for each of them, preserving them in existence.

Gospel Reading: An instance where the Lord expressly turns his attention to a wealthy person. As a tax-collector, he was despised and hated, because he collected the taxes from God's People for the hated Romans, often defrauding the poor to fill their own pockets. But in this case, Zachaeus had used his wealth to good purpose, and his earnest desire to encounter Christ won the Lord's approval. Jesus does not disdain to enter his house, for he is the Savior of all, rich and poor alike. All men are sinners and need the saving healing of Jesus. The entire scene is vividly depicted and even amusing in some details.

Second Reading: If the Christians are to be worthy of their call, and carry out the works of faith, it will be the powerful working of God who accomplishes it in them. For that Paul prays, since it will accrue both to the glory of Christ and to their own. Precisely this is the important angle of their striving, not whether the Coming of the Lord was imminent or not. Rumor from several sources had it that it was. Paul sets aside all such notions. The life of a Christian has deeper realities to live for.

II. HOMILIES FOR SEPTEMBER

WHAT CHRIST EXPECTS OF HIS FOLLOWERS

September 4, 1977 (Twenty-Third Sunday)

The Human Situation: We read in the second book of Maccabees (6:18) that the aged Eleazar who was being forced to transgress the Law, stoutly refused. Some of his old friends took pity on him and taking him aside, advised him merely to pretend to eat the sacrificial meat prescribed by the pagan king, but in reality to eat food prepared by himself. In this way he would escape the death penalty. Eleazar abhorred such pretense. What an example to give to the youth, he countered! And if I avoid punishment of men for some time, I shall never, whether alive or dead, escape the hands of the Almighty! With that he went to his death nobly and gloriously. Eleazar lived up to his inner convictions.

The Good News: In a country predominantly Christian, it is not too difficult to consider oneself Christian by attending Sunday services, receiving the Sacraments from time to time, paying Church dues, sending children to Catholic schools, and many such external activities. Yet, such a person could be quite far from the real Christian spirit that Christ demands of his loyal followers. What are our attitudes toward those things that Christ taught concerning the inner man of the heart? Things that lead away from him, such as occasions of sin, be they person, places, human transactions, evil literature, or the like. Did he not say that what comes out of the mouth, not what goes into it pollutes a man? And again, has he not warned that if the eye is an occasion of sin, we should pluck it out. Likewise, if the hand is an occasion of sin, to cut it off. Surely he is not wanting us to mutilate the body on every occasion of sin, for that would not have the desired effect. The eye and the hand are intended by him to be taken figuratively: whatever is as near and dear to us an eye or a hand, but leads into serious sin which separates us from Christ, must be parted with. It is always necessary to prefer Christ to anyone or anything, no matter how dear, if it stands in the way.

Or, what is our attitude toward social justice? Decent wages for our servants and employees, decent living conditions, provision for sickness and old age for those who work for us, proper time for recreation and for their religious Sunday duties? If our value-judgments do not come up to his in these matters, we may be Christian in name, but hardly in fact. For if Christ went so far as to say: "Give to the man who begs from you" (Mt. 5:42), how much more does he expect us to give what is due to those who are not begging from us, but working for us to gain a livelihood

for themselves and their families! There are people who give large sums of money to public causes, and even to church activities, but who are extremely parsimonious toward those over whom they hold immediate control. Yet, charity begins at home, as the old saying goes.

Again, what are our reactions when some relative or friends come between Christ and us with their schemes, suggestions and plans, dubious or even downright dishonest? Do we have the courage to resist this pressure to act against our Christian principles and convictions? No one is allowed to stand in the way of Christ. Did he not say in today's gospel: No one can be his follower unless we opt for him, even if our closest relatives stand in the way? Nor can we be his follower if we allow our selfish cravings to enter forbidden avenues, even though those paths would enrich us with power and wealth, and thus take us away from our sole salvation, Christ the Lord. In this life a choice must be made: Whoever would save his life here below, that is, give in to each and every whim and urge, will surely lose it, but whoever loses his life for his sake, that is curbs those unlawful inclinations and urges, will find it (Mt. 16: 25). Christ demands much, but rewards most generously.

Again, what is our reaction when the cross enters into our lives in the form of sudden setbacks, sickness, accident, loss of money similar hardships? Can we recognize Christ's cross in these happenings and remember his words: "Anyone who does not take up his cross cannot be his disciple?" The cross may be our own character faults, or the people we live with, the people placed over us, or the world situation we are part of. The Savior demands that we carry the cross, not moan about it. With love for all, even our enemies, we shall prove to be his true followers. From today's gospel we see that it takes much courage and constant striving to be a real follower of Christ. The call is great, but so is the challenge.

Our Response: It is not easy to live consistently the Christian commitment we have taken upon ourselves in baptism. But Jesus by his passion and death has won for us his own Spirit who is all powerful and who is assisting us, abiding with us always. If we use the means at our disposal, the Spirit will enlighten us and assist us to be true and loyal followers of Christ unto the end. And the end is the glorious beginning of life eternal!

DIVINE COMPASSION

September 11, 1977 (Twenty-Fourth Sunday)

The Human Situation: On Friday, August 2, 1968, an hour before dawn a strong earthquake shook Manila. Disaster concentrated on one particular building called Ruby Towers. It was six stories high and covered an entire block. Three hundred persons died in the disaster but almost as many were rescued, because for eleven days, six thousand volunteers from all ages and stations in life went to work with hands or pick and shovel, moved with compassion for those unfortunate ones. What an admirable example of selfless love for persons who were total strangers for the most part. They were all God's children who needed help.

The Good New: When spiritual disaster overtakes a man and he falls into sin away from God, the Lord does not abandon him to himself in his sinfulness, and it would be contrary to the lesson of love he thought us, to despise such persons and to want to have nothing to do with them. Like the shepherd in today's gospel, the Savior goes in search of his lost sheep. It is his possession and he himself takes the initiative to rescue it, as is so beautiful depicted in Francis Thompson's poem, "The Hound of Heaven". The Lord himself gave existence and life to that particular person, endowed him with many gifts of body and spirit, gave up his only Son to death for his sake, and imparted his Spirit to him as a pledge of immortality. Shall he not seek it out now that it has gone lost? Like a tender and loving shepherd, God pursues the wayward heart to bring it back to himself.

In the large city of Paris in France, a young lad decided to run away from parental care and love. The parents were grief-stricken, for they had given the boy every means of happiness and fulfillment. Every search and inquiry was of no avail. Then they tried one last resort: they had large placards made and placed all over Paris. The placards bore this message: "Son, come back, We love you. Signed . . . mother and father". And the lad came back. Many a sinner returns to God because of the thought of God's divine compassion and love as depicted in today's gospel. He is like the woman who lost the coin, so necessary and dear to her, and who searched frantically till she had it again in her possession. Still more, he is like the father of the prodigal who could not wait for the son's return, but ran out to meet and embrace him, and shower him with totally unexpected kindness. (See biblical notes for today). Such is God's love. He has a hundred ways to draw the sinner back to himself: the inner voice of the Holy Spirit, the good example of others, a seemingly casual remark or reading-

matter, a heavy chastisement, a sudden recognition of one's misery and one's need of God.

God does not want the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. Divine compassion has brought back many a hardened sinner known to us from the pages of history, but also many unknown who glorify God's compassion for all eternity, now that they are forever in the mansion of the Father, safe at home in his embrace.

Our Response: It is risky to postpone conversion, for God is all merciful but he will not be mocked. Even one passion uncontrolled can bring one to the brink of spiritual disaster, as it did Judas. Decision now! Jesus stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3.20).

CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD WISER?

September 18, 1977 (Twenty-Fifth Sunday)

The Human Situation: Printed in a Communist paper some years ago was this boast: "We Communists will win. We are determined to win, we are ready to pay the price. We give all we can of our pay, we give our spare time and part of our holidays. But you Christians give little time and money for the spread of the Gospel. We shall win, because we are convinced of our Communist message, because we are ready to sacrifice all, even our life, for our cause. But you Christians won't even dirty your hands".

The Good News: It is not true that all Christians are apathetic toward the Kingdom of God and Christ's Gospel message of salvation. Many are truly devoted to promoting religious activities and fostering good works of all kinds, be they men in high position, successful business men or common day laborers or students. Many do use their resources as suggested by the Lord to do good to others, and carry out Christ's commandment of love. But the Lord in today's gospel does state that many of the children of this world put far more effort in succeeding in their affairs, or advancing their career, than many Christians do with regard to what is of much higher value: attaining true happiness in Christ which will last forever, and spreading the Good News by word and deed to their fellowmen so that mankind come to know Christ and share in his riches.

All readily admit that the majority of peasants are obliged to put almost all their time and effort in trying to feed and clothe a growing family. Far from being worldly-minded, such people are helping build God's reign on earth in their own way. Often they are happier in their simple life-style and their deeply religious convictions than many well-to-do people. The Lord has rather in mind those who are clever enough to get ahead in life. They put in long hours on their projects, plan carefully, proceed shrewdly, and let no stone unturned to reach the peak of worldly success. They examine the latest methods and adopt them, buy the most up-to-date machinery, and espouse the surest polices. Such effort is bound to be crowned with success in the world.

Are most Christians as diligent in channelling their efforts toward lasting values? Did not Jesus tell us in the sermon on the mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode, thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also" (Mt. 6: 19-21). Jesus pronounced the poor as blessed, for even if they had little of this world's goods, their hope was the reign of God which they would share abundantly. Once he told his followers to invite the poor and the lame and the sick when they gave a dinner so that they could not repay with this world's goods, but reward would be stored up in the resurrection of the just (Lk. 14:12-14). In all these instances, Jesus is aiming at keeping our minds on gaining the kingdom of God, and on obtaining things of true and lasting value.

Many zealous people of other confessions, such as Jehovah Witnesses, Sabbatists, and others, can put us to shame by their continued efforts to make converts, sell their literature, preach and argue their point. Catholics can do the same. Youth is inventive. We have a genuine message, and solid wares to peddle. The Christian message is all satisfying. It only needs to be presented correctly and appealing, and it will be lived with energy. It is surprising what any group of men or women can accomplish if they are determined to promote true Christian values. They must set to work with determination, cooperation and guided purpose. Many a parish and many a school bears witness to splendid deeds for Christ and one's fellowmen. For such as these, the children of the world are not wiser. They themselves have discovered where true values lie.

Our Response: If there are such activities in your parish or school to promote God's reign on earth or help others in their needs.

Join them and give it your best. If there is none, try to speak to others about getting it started. Those who have the true faith should be the most zealous in spreading it.

TABLES TURNED

September 25, 1977 (Twenty-sixth Sunday)

For the homily on the gospel, develop the parable as given in detail in the biblical notes for today. Draw out the picture in detail and elaborate on the many lessons contained in it as given there.

II. HOMILIES FOR OCTOBER

CORRECT ATTITUDES IN THE SERVICE OF GOD

October 2, 1977: Twenty-Seventh Sunday

The Human Situation: When Napoleon came to power, St. Vincent de Paul had already founded the Daughters of Charity. One day, someone was praising to the skies the works of philanthropy of a certain gentleman, when Napoleon interrupted him saying: "Give me a Daughter of Charity any time". He knew only too well that the simple, humble faith and loving service of a Sister accomplished more for the real good of man than all the external works of philanthropy, for God was working his marvels in the humble servants of his choice.

The Good News: Some people are inclined to think that God owes them a reward for the labors they perform for him. Day after day they serve him in one way or another in caring for those in their charge, in the service of the public, in various undertakings for the common good. They live with the impression that God owes them good health so that they can carry on their work, a decent wage so that they can raise their family and give it a decent education. Their relationship to God is in the form of a contract: I'll serve you, Lord, but I expect you to reward me with your blessings.

God will reward every good deed, but he owes no one anything. He is not obliged to anybody. That is just the lesson today's parable.

We are servants in the service of the Most High, and service is expected of every servant. Does the lady or the master of the house pour out her thanks to the servants who clean the house, prepare the meals, act as guard, chauffeur, gardener or laundry-woman? That is their duty. Truly Jesus has said: "I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends" (Jn. 15:15), yet this is sheer goodness and love on his part. And if the good God has promised to reward everyone according to his works this is the action of divine generosity and love, not a result of justice owing it to us. God is never outdone in generosity and rewards even a cup of cold water given to Christ's little one (Mt. 10:42). But as soon as man thinks that God really owes him salvation or the goods of this life, he is barking up the wrong tree.

That is why today's gospel begins with the great efficacy of faith in performing great deeds. All that man accomplishes by himself is really nothing in God's sight compared to what God can do by means of a man of faith. Jesus illustrates this by the figure of a sycamore tree (black mulberry), the roots of which are so strong that it can stand for six centuries, despite the storms to which it is exposed. Yet, to make clear the dynamic power of faith, Jesus says that a mere word spoken in genuine faith can accomplish marvellous things, illustrated by that same sturdy sycamore tree being up-rooted and transplanted into the sea! The apostles were wondering how they could carry out the difficult demands of the Master. Not by your own energy, he makes clear to them, but by relying totally in faith on God's power.

Our Response: Man is inclined to boast of his accomplishments, and often that gets on the nerves of the listeners. It takes solid virtue to think humbly of oneself and realize that 'unless the Lord builds the house, we build it in vain' (Ps. 127). Yet it is the humble man who quietly goes about doing his duty that is pleasing to both God and man. Our Blessed Savior never went about boasting of his accomplishments, but he attributed all his works to the Father working in him. This is our model.

BASE INGRATITUDE

October 9, 1977: Twenty-eighth Sunday.

The Human Situation: A juvenile delinquent on parole was taken in by a family who already had five children of their own. He made such a good impression and pleased the whole family so much that they decided to adopt him and consider him as equal to the

rest. On Sunday night he stayed out late, and when he returned, the mother, who had stayed up waiting for him, gently admonished him and reminded him of the time he should be in. He said nothing and retired. Early next morning when the father was off to work and the children already at school, he stole down to the basement where the mother was washing clothes, and with a sledgehammer, knocked her down and beat her to death. Then he fled. The father on returning could only weep and shake his head. "He killed my wife", he said between sobs, "and we loved him so". Who can understand the human heart with such base ingratitude?

The Good News: Gratitude is the mark of a noble soul. The Heart of Jesus overflows with gratitude. How often in the gospel we read of him praising and thanking the Father for all he had done: for revealing his secrets to those of childlike disposition (Mt. 11:25), for hearing his prayer in the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:41), but especially when he instituted the holy Eucharist, which is the very sacrifice of thanksgiving, for Eucharist means thanksgiving. A dutiful Son of God, as our Brother, gives thanks to the Father for all the wonderful things given to his brothers and sisters, who often forget to thank God in their turn. He offers himself as a thanksgiving-sacrifice worthy of the God who is all good and munificent.

Lack of gratitude, on the other hand, betrays great self-centeredness. All ten lepers came and expressed faith in the power of Jesus to cure them. All ten stood the test that they first go and show themselves to the priest, which was the requirement of all lepers who were cured. This command of Jesus tested them because they were only cured while they were on the way. But as with so many people who receive a favor from God which they were asking for, the nine were so much wrapped up with this new life and the possibilities it gave them, that they completely forgot the Benefactor who had bestowed it. Jesus certainly expected all ten to show some sign of gratitude. He expresses surprise: Where are the other nine? Were not all ten cured! What made it worse was that the only one who returned to give thanks was the very one whom the others, who were Jews despised, he being a Samaritan, and the Jews considered them half-pagan, strangers to the Covenant not worthy to be called children of Abraham. Yet it was the lone Samaritan who returned and gave loud thanks, falling on his face before the Lord.

Ingratitude is so base that even Jesus, who is otherwise so undemanding and so selfless, cannot let this pass by without commending: Where are the other nine! He was displeased that the very ones who prided themselves as children of Abraham should be so lacking in a fundamental trait of human nature, that they took

all God's favors for granted, as if they had them coming to them. Yet in this they are followed by many down to our own day. We can learn from St. Paul to foster true gratitude to the Lord. In almost every letter right after the salutation he breaks into a word of praise and thanksgiving for the faith of his converts, their love shown in many deeds, their hope of their calling. Paul had learned the lesson well from the Master.

A coast guard, hearing the cries for help, dove into the waters of the sea and pulled out a drowning boy. He administered mouth to mouth respiration until he revived him. In the excitement he had torn somewhat the boy's bathing suit. After letting him rest sufficiently, he inquired where the lad lived and then led the boy back to his home and gave him to his mother. The mother took at the torn bathing suit and let out a volley of angry words at the coast-guard. Later on he told his companions: I did not expect any special thanks or any sign of gratitude, but neither did I expect to get calling down and a bitter berating for what I had done. Such is the mark of ingratitude. The great favor is taken for granted. The small defect or lack is bitterly criticized. When will man learn to be truly human?

Our Response: Many people make novenas for favors to be granted. How many do so in thanksgiving? Thanksgiving masses for favors granted are few in comparison with those offered for special intentions or for the faithful departed. People often say prayers before meals, especially children, but run off forgetting to say a prayer of thanksgiving after meals. A well-brought up child has learned to say "thank you" for anything received. The one who has not received this training accepts whatever he can get but with no word of thanks and no sign of gratitude. Ingratitude comes quite natural to a growing child. Gratitude must be learned. Only when the child learns how dependent he is on others will he be truly grateful for what they do for him.

NEVER GIVE UP

October 16, 1977: Twenty-ninth Sunday

The Human Situation: Eddi, aged thirty-two, braved choppy seas with his wife and six others after abandoning their ill-fated sailboat and clinging to a raft off the coast of Negros Occidental. Sharks overtook them as they were getting closer to shore. Three of them perished by the sharks but the rest fought on. Three days and three nights without food, they never gave up hope that they would be rescued. It was the thought of their four children

they had left behind that gave Eddi and his wife courage to hope and pray until they were rescued and safe on shore.

The Good News: The blessed Savior made a solemn promise: "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds; the one who knocks, enters (Mt. 7-7-8). There are no strings attached to this promise. There are no conditions. Jesus assured his followers that if they ask God, they are certain to be heard. That is the lesson of today's parable. It was specially spoken for those who have been praying unceasingly for a longer time and still do not experience that their prayers are answered. Yet, we must not lose heart, St. Luke tells us at the outset, for just as the poor widow kept coming back again and again until her case was won, so the Christians must never lose hope, never give up, no matter how dark the day and trying the circumstances. God will hear their prayers in his own time. He will vindicate the oppressed, and liberate the down-trodden.

It is not easy to keep praying when heaven seems to turn a deaf ear to our prayers. Man is easily discouraged for his sight is short-ranged while that of God is long-ranged. The parents of John the Baptist had undoubtedly prayed long and fervently for a son until they were advanced in years and all natural hope for offspring was gone (Lk. 1:18). Yet just when things looked impossible, the Lord gave them a son who was the greatest of all the prophets, even becoming the forerunner of the Messiah-King of Israel! Of Jesus himself in the Garden of Gethsemane it is written that again and again he begged the Father to let the cup of suffering pass by him, yet he added at once: "Not as I will but as you will" (Mt. 26:39). More graphically still the same scene is narrated in the letter to the Hebrews, when it says that Jesus "offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to God, who was able to save him from death" (Hb. 5:7) and the sacred author adds: "He was heard because of his reverent submission" (v. 7). He had submitted to the Father and the Father had given him strength to go through the ordeal, so that "he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (v. 9). That was after all why he became man: to save us, so that was in reality his true prayer. This gives us some insight as to how God hears prayers. Jesus said: Ask, and you will receive. He did not add: You will always receive what you ask for. That is why he added the parable of the boy who asked bread from his father. Would the father give him a stone instead? (Mt. 7:9). But perhaps what he is asking for is in reality harmful for him, like a stone would

be. God will certainly hear his prayer, because God is a loving Father, but it will be something which will be for his good.

When Paul was given "a thorn in the flesh" and a very annoying trial to hinder his work, he begged the Lord three times that it might be taken away. The Lord did not take it away. He said instead: "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Paul then boasted of his weaknesses in order that the power of God be manifested in him. His prayer was heard on a much higher level than he had expected. He obtained the strength to bear up in his trials and be perfected by them.

Our Response: Determination to win out is the first step to success. Many a battle has been won, even when things looked hopeless, because the man in charge refused to give up. He never lost hope. And finally success was the outcome. Only those English martyrs at the time of Henry and Elizabeth the First, who doggedly persevered in praying and hoping, remained faithful to the end. Many defected when the years dragged on and no liberation was at hand. We must pray always and never lose heart. Only then is victory sure.

HE WHO HUMBLER HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED

October 23, 1977: Thirtieth Sunday.

The Human Situation: From early childhood, Therese of the Child Jesus had a burning desire to love God and give herself for the salvation of souls. To attain this end, she practiced no showy piety, no great acts of penance. On the contrary, she has given the world her "little way" of simplicity, confidence and love. As a Carmelite nun, for nine years she endeavored to be at the service of everyone. At her death no one guessed her great sanctity. Twenty-seven years later she was canonized, setting aside all previous records. God exalted her by having the Holy Father proclaim her patroness of all missionaries. A perfect example of greatness consisting in littleness, and doing small things out of great love.

The Good News: The biblical notes for this Sunday offer ample material to show that it is the humble heart that pleases God. The proud he rejects.

SEEKING AND FINDING CHRIST

October 30, 1977: Thirty-first Sunday.

The Human Situation: Catherine de Heuck, in her book, "Poustinia" tells us of a wealthy Russian, who became so enamored of Christ that he gathered up all his money and distributed it to the poor. Then with a simple garment and staff, a loaf of bread in his bag, no shoes on his feet, he spent the rest of his life as a pilgrim. Yet more: he was recognized one day on the steps of a cathedral in Kief, with many other beggars. His hair was disheveled, his eyes had a vacant stare, his face was grimy. When asked why he let himself be taken for an idiot and a retarded person, he answered: "I am atoning for the men who called Christ a fool in his lifetime and for centuries after". How many would be willing to imitate that aspect of the passion of Jesus, and let themselves be regarded as idiots and fools!

The Good News: Zachaeus, in today's gospel, was a wealthy man, but surprisingly, he not only gave large sums to the poor as many wealthy persons do with generous hearts, but even half of his possessions. And in case he had defrauded anyone, he did not only make up, but restored four times as much. Certainly a man of sincere heart. This sincerity won for him the grace to seek out the Savior, and to obtain the grace of salvation. He is not ashamed to go to amusing extremes to obtain his goal. Being a man of short stature, one of his rank and file could easily have had servants lift him high on a conveyance, or command the crowd to make way. Instead, he did not deem it below his dignity to climb a tree in order not to miss seeing the Savior. Jesus is won over by this eager and searching heart. How easily the Master could simply had acknowledge the man's good will with a nod, and passed on. But no! He stops, and calls to Zachaeus, with everybody looking up at the man in the tree. "Zachaeus, hurry down, I mean to stay in your house today" (Lk. 19:5).

With joy that knows no bounds, Zachaeus comes hastily down, and receives the Savior in his home. Of course there is murmuring and complaining. All tax-collectors were considered base men, sinners, are were despised for they were in the service of the Romans in order to collect the taxes from the people. They were known to defraud, to squeeze all they could out of their fellowmen,

in order to swell their own pockets. But Jesus sees the heart. He cares little what people think. Zachaeus is sincerely seeking him. That is enough. The Savior will come and dine with him.

Christ came to save all men, rich and poor alike. What he wants is the heart, the interior disposition of sincere repentance. It matters little to him whether the one seeks him if a man of rank and file, or a poor laborer, whether it is a tax-collector who had gone astray, a Magdalen in devious ways, or anyone of the despised crowd. All men need a Savior and that is why he became one of them. Seek, and you will find, he had said. Each and everyone who seeks Christ will surely find him and enjoy his friendship. "Here I stand, knocking at the door" he tells us in the book of Revelation (3:20). "If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me". Let the weary heart turn to Christ because he said. Come to me, all you are weary and overburdened, and you will find rest for your souls (Mt. 11:28:). Man need only open his heart to Christ, and the Lord will enter in, as he came to the house of Zachaeus that day. "For the Son of man has come to search out and save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10).

When people complained about Mother Teresa of India, that it was a waste of time and money to take the dying off the streets into her homes, since they would only die in a day or two anyway, Mother Teresa replied: "I can give that person at least one day of love". Who knows how many persons have found Christ in the warm embrace of Mother Teresa! They may never have read of Christ, but they experienced his tender love and care in the person of her who represents him so forefully, and incarnates his love again for poor fallen man.

Our response: There are many who are seeking Christ, though they may not be aware of it. And there are many ways of bringing others to Christ. But the best way is by our own personality, letting the countenance of Christ shine forth in our words and deeds, so that our fellowmen find strength and refreshment in their weary journey of life. Many are the wounds of mankind today, and only the healing power of Christ's Spirit can bring them soothing refreshment. It is up to the members of Christ to make known his love and his mercy, that sincere persons of all ranks find him who is the salvation of the world.