

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time “A” Corpus Christi 2011

Matthew 23:1-12

In recent years there has been a crusade in some Christian circles against Halloween. For some people, everything evil has found its home in Halloween, which supposedly celebrates the existence of witches, goblins, devils, vampires, and ghosts. History does not support this view. For over five hundred years Halloween has been celebrated as the eve of All Saints Day, which commemorates devout Christians who have died. All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, has been a time to thumb the nose at death, to threaten the powers of death lightly, as a way of keeping them in perspective. Halloween says that such things as goblins, ghosts, and witches are not to be taken seriously. We dress up in costumes to look like them as a way of treating them with humor. Those who oppose Halloween may be inadvertently supporting what they oppose. They may succeed in making Halloween something evil. By calling for a ban on something we usually make it stronger. As members of Christ's eternal realm, we need not fear any of the so-called creatures of darkness, most of which are creations of the human imagination.

So much for Halloween....

I like to talk about always expecting instant gratification. Especially in our religious life. At some point we must quit rushing out to fight what we are certain are God's battles. It is better to have faith in God, to turn some things over to God. If God does not work swiftly enough for us, let us remember that “the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.” Well, this adage comes from a seventeenth-century German writer by the name of Friedrich von Logau, translated by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Here is Longfellow's translation of the German: “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small; / though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.”

We don't like slow things. We like fast things, instant things. Today we are programmed not only to want instant gratification, but to expect it. Through our increasingly sophisticated electronic media we find out about world events almost as soon as they happen. In such a world, how frustrated we get when we do not get instant results from God. Look around you and see how many proclaim a God or a gospel of the “quick fix.” Jesus taught that we must trust in a God who may, by our standards, grinds slowly, but who grinds thoroughly. In today's Gospel passage from Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples and the crowds that the way things are is not the way things will always be.

The Pharisees, he says, may lord it over you here and now, but there is a day coming when “the greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts

himself will be humbled: but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

The current Systems may seem permanently entrenched, but they are not. There is a new system coming, and things will not always be as they are. As followers of Christ, we need to hear the words of Francis Quarles, English Poet: “My soul, sit thou a patient looker-on; /Judge not the play before the play is done: /her plot hath many changes; every day / Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the play.”

The dream of Father Justin Belitz.

Father Justin Belitz is a Franciscan priest at a monastery in Indiana. At a height of only five feet, he stands tall in most crowds because of his delightful personality. He is a popular speaker and retreat leader. Father Justin tells a wonderful story of the strange fulfillment of a live-long dream.

As a child he was fascinated by dancing and dancers. He never tired of watching couples like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance. He dreamed of someday wearing a black tuxedo and dancing like Fred Astaire with a beautiful woman like Ginger Rogers. He took dancing lessons and even danced in some musicals. But he became a priest. So much for his dreams!

Years later, father Justin was to attend a convocation somewhere in Europe and decided to take an ocean liner. On the ship he dressed casually, in “civilian” clothes and made friends with many of his fellow passengers. He discovered that each night after dinner there was dancing on board. With great pleasure he danced for hours each evening with different women among his new acquaintances. By the last day he had run out of non-clerical clothes, so he put on his collar and black suit. When he entered the dining room, a number of his traveling companions learned for the first time that he was a priest. You can imagine their reaction. After some interesting conversations, one of the women he had danced with asked if she could have a private word with him. They left the dining room and went up on the deck of the ship.

The moon and stars was shining brightly and it was a beautiful night. The woman took both of Father Justin’s hands in her own. She said: “Dancing with you these past evenings, I had no idea you were a priest, but I liked you. I haven’t talked with a priest in many years; but, now that I know who you are, there are some things in my life I would really like to talk with you about.”

Father Justin says he was suddenly aware that his childhood ambition had been realized. He was, dressed in black, face to face with an attractive woman, doing something more beautiful even than dancing. Who could ever imagine, he thought, in what ways one’s dreams might come true?

Faith as patience. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind. On the negative side, no one ever really “gets away” with anything. On the positive

side, nor a single good intention goes unblessed. “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

We need to cultivate patience as part of our faith. How many times do the scriptures say, “Wait for the Lord”? To really believe in something is to be both willing and able to wait. Do you believe that the last will be first, and the first last? Do you believe that those who grasp for life lose it, and those who lose their lives for Christ’ sake find life? Do you believe in peace on earth, good will toward all?---that someday the lion will lie down with the lamb?

Do you believe in the healing of the nations, and the new heaven and new earth, and the city not made with hands? Do you believe that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, that he will reign forever and ever? Do you believe an eternal place in God’s own heart has been prepared for you? Do you? Then patiently wait. “The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.”