

[Readings: 1 Kings 17:10-16; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44]

There is a big difference between God's economy plan of salvation, and our basic human economic practices. We human beings are lovers of "quid pro quo," economics: you give me something, I give you something; you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. This kind of economic plan is incompatible with God's.

The widow, who gives everything out of her poverty, is a reminder of our need for an economic conversion. The scribes use their religious knowledge and importance to curry favor with their co-religionists. They treat religion as a way of "building up their brand," enjoying long dinners at the homes of widows.

Jesus sees the rich people approach the treasury. They give huge sums of money. In essence, they're "[building up their brand](#)." Religious people "gotta" give alms. And they do. The poor widow is different.

In giving her two coins, she gets nothing in return. There will be no invitation to a dinner honoring those who have donated. She will not get her name on a building in the Temple complex. And yet, it is the [poor widow](#) who has given everything. She has given her whole self in giving away all she has.

Remember that contestant on the game show "Jeopardy" who waged everything he had on a Daily Double question? He would push his hands away from him in a gesture that said, "I'm all in." That's what donating the two coins to the Temple treasury symbolized. It means that she is "all in."

Jesus' observation of the widow has its roots in today's Old Testament First Reading. A widow gives drink and feeds Elijah. She has nothing. But through her generosity to a prophet of God, her flour and oil do not go dry for a year. She is "all in."

This is what God wants from us. God wants us to give not out of our surplus, but out of our basic sustenance. God doesn't want us to give away everything we have; God wants us to dedicate everything we have received from Him to His greater glory. He wants us to be "all in" with our time, talent and treasure. With all that we have, and all that we are.

Jesus chastises the Scribes and the Pharisees, the leaders and doctors of the Law, because they were concerned more about external details than with internal conversion. I wear long robes when I celebrate Mass. I am given places of honor at banquets. I am called by lofty titles. But that should not be what I am all about. It's not what's on the outside that counts; it's what is happening on the inside. Where is my heart? What are my intentions? What do I treasure?

Among the many prayers I say every morning, the Prayer of St. Ignatius Loyal fits in with the theme of today's readings:

"Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will." Of course, the more He takes my memory, the older I get, the more I am forgetting things! "Take, Lord, receive all I have and possess. You have given all to me, now I return it. Take, Lord, receive all is your now. Dispose of it, only according to your will. Give me only your love and your grace; that's enough for me."

Abiding in God's economy is risky. It means that we don't save any part of ourselves for a rainy day. The Kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurates requires us to spend our whole selves. And if we do, God will give us more.

This is not a return to our own economic logic. We can think that if we give out of our poverty, out of our lack, that we should expect a tangible reward.

In thinking this way, we may fall back into "quid pro quo." I have given you everything, Lord, and now YOU owe ME.

No! In giving everything, we get something even more remarkable. We discover that in our poverty, in our total abandonment with Christ, we receive a new source of wealth. And what is that new source? Spoiler alert! We receive union with our beloved God. After all, on the cross, it is Jesus who gives out of His nothingness. Out of His pain, His suffering, His condemnation by men and women, He gives everything. Jesus is "all in."

He is the Great High Priest of the Letter to the Hebrews, Who sacrifices Himself once and for all. In His death, He puts an end to our own human economy of "quid pro quo."

And therefore, like the poor widow, we must follow the example of Jesus Christ. We must [give everything back](#) to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We must hold nothing back. Our sorrows. Our joys. Our weakness. It must be offered back in love to God. Not so that we can get something out of it. But because God's economy, marked by pure gratuity, is the way toward an unimaginable happiness.

Think of a time when someone did something for you that was totally unexpected. It's a wonderful feeling to get help when you really need it or to have someone do a huge favor for you. To receive assistance from another person also involves giving up control and depending on another. To have such an experience calls forth a profound sense of gratitude. That's what Jesus did for the world. He gave himself for others so that all may live. All you have to do is accept that offer.

This week is the Week of Prayer for Vocations. May all of us pray that, like the widow, we will be "all in" as ordained, consecrated, married and single believers. They and we will be the future saints, who even now, give themselves to us, as we give ourselves to them. They intercede for us because their existence is wholly for God and therefore wholly for us. Let us long to join their company, their economy of gift beyond gift. Are YOU "all in?" AMEN!

[Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32]

There is a popular bumper sticker regarding the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time for the General Judgment of humanity. It simply says, "Jesus is coming! Look busy!" Another sticker adds: "And BOY is He ticked off!"

Divine Judgment is real. Our Catholic faith tells us this in the Profession of Faith we proclaim every Sunday: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We call it Heaven. But there is also a state of existence called Hell. I believe that we have had a taste of both here on earth.

When we are at absolute peace with God in our hearts, when we experience the love, the joy and the laughter of each other, when we sacrifice and give of ourselves so much that it hurts, when our pets love us unconditionally and our friends are there for us, this is only a taste of what Heaven is like.

But when we experience hate, abuse, abandonment and alienation; when we are misunderstood, rejected and shunned by others whom we trusted and loved and thought loved us; when our hearts ache following the death of a child, a spouse, a parent, a dear friend; when we do not seem to have any purpose in life, and all life seems to be one great empty waste; when there is no hope, no health, no income, and no one around who loves us, this is a taste of Hell.

Now take both experiences of Heaven and Hell on earth, and multiply it by eternity, by infinity. Put God into this equation and we can conclude that one day we will be either eternally happy or eternally full of the unending pain of the anxiety of separation from God.

Spoiler alert! The choice is not God's. The judgment is not God's. The choice is ours. And we bring judgment upon ourselves. This too can be Heaven or Hell.

Jesus speaks of the great tribulation in today's Gospel, but believe it or not, this is not a gloom and doom prophecy. It is a message of hope. Jesus calls these apocalyptic, end-of-the-world special effects the "beginning of the birth pangs." All of creation will just be going into labor.

It is time for the Great Birth to take place. This is the moment of the Resurrection of the Dead.

This is what Catholic theology calls the Day of Judgment.

A whole series of books was written based on the prediction of Jesus Christ saying in the Gospel of Luke that, "one will be taken, the other will be left behind." The series inspired the totally fictional "Left Behind" series. These books imply that the souls of the just will be taken from earth in the middle of its earthly existence, with the poor lost souls battling Satan for power here on earth.

I imagine myself standing next to my best friend, who gets pulled up into Heaven, leaving me behind. I look up to Heaven and say, "Aw, Man..."

But Jesus is speaking of the last days. The "Rapture" as some call it, again, with no actual basis in Scripture, will not happen as they think in earth time, but at the end of time. When Jesus returns, time and space are over.

So when the Lord comes at the end of time, you might call it our Second Birthday, or the Day of Our Rebirth. Jesus says in the Gospel of John when He tells His disciples "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (John 16:21-22)."

Everything financial and material that we attach ourselves to so dearly in this world is moving in the natural direction of its mortal limits. If we believe there's more to life than this, then we need to give attention to that world beyond this world. The fig tree's lesson is so simple, perhaps it takes a child to understand it.

Famous secular prophets and political pundits have predicted that if and when we engage in World War III, it will begin with unrest in the Middle East. Look around us and around the world to see if that is not in fact happening now.

So far, the Doomsday prophets predicted the end of the world three times. Remember Y2K? Everything was going to ruin on January 1, 2000. Here we are twenty-one years later.

Another false prophet predicted that The End would come on a Saturday evening at 6 PM. That particular Saturday, I had just completed the 5 PM Mass in my last parish. Confessions would follow after Mass. It was 10 minutes to 6. I

had only one customer. She came into the Reconciliation Room and began her confession with these words: "I know the end isn't going to happen at 6 PM. I know this. But just in case, I want to be in a state of grace."

The latest false prediction is December 8<sup>th</sup>. Only three weeks away. So get your affairs in order! I am already planning on having a big breakfast on December 9<sup>th</sup>!

The human community -- nations and kingdoms -- will break down. Then the earth will stop yielding food and begin to shake apart. Next, the family will be torn apart from within and the last faithful individuals will be persecuted. Finally, the Temple will be desecrated, and the earth will be emptied of God's presence.

When Jesus says, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place, He means it WILL take place the day that you and I die, the day you and I breathe our last natural breath.

Reading the Signs of the Times may lead us to think that the return of the Lord is imminent, near, at hand. In one way that should scare us, but only if we are not ready and prepared to meet Him.

The last few people I have given the Last Rites to have inspired me with their readiness to meet the Lord. Three months ago, I heard the best comment yet, from an elderly lady, after I gave her Viaticum – the Sacrament that literally means, "On the road with you." She thanked me and then said, "I'm ready... Let's roll!" Those were the same words said on September 11, 2001 by the brave heroes on Flight 99 in Shanksville, Pennsylvania when they thwarted the terrorists on the plane: "Let's roll!"

Jesus certainly will come at the last day of our earthly life, whenever that will be. Will we be ready to meet Him? Let us stay in the race. Let us win the game. Let us receive the crown of eternal life. AMEN!

[Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Ps. 93; Rev. 1:5-8; John 18:33b-37]

Timothy P. O'Malley, Ph.D., the director of education at the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, offers this reflection on the proper role of politics in the Church. He says this:

You often hear people say that politics have no place in the Church. Many Americans are leaving Christianity because they see it as being mixed up with the political. They grow more suspicious of a Church that gets involved in elections. In some ways, these disaffiliated persons are correct. The Church ceases to practice the Politics of the Kingdom of God when full support is given to a specific candidate or when the ministers of the Church implicitly support a politician because of the D or R or I that follows their name.

But they're also wrong to think that our Church has nothing to do with politics. Even Mahatma Gandhi called politics without principles one of the Seven Deadly Sins of the Modern World. The other Deadly Sins are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity, knowledge without character, commerce without morality and worship without sacrifice.

The Church is intrinsically political, as we hear in today's Gospel. Jesus encounters Pilate. Pilate is the bad politician par excellence. He knows how to curry favor with the right people at the right time. And he's climbing. He does not want to remain the procurator of backwater Jerusalem.

And yet, there's Jesus. This Jewish man, who has been brought forward to be executed by Roman authorities.

Pilate asks: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus responds, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (Jn 18:37).

This is the Kingship of Jesus. This is the politics of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the King Who speaks truth into a world committed to lies. He proclaims light in the darkness. The Church is properly political when the Church follows her Lord in [speaking the truth](#).

Might isn't right. [Power is made perfect in weakness](#). Every life is sacred. This is the truth. And those who pursue the truth will listen to the voice of the King, Whose throne is the Cross. The Church must restrict herself to the politics of the Kingdom of God.

Pontius Pilate walks back and forth between his private quarters and the public courtyard no fewer than seven times. He cannot make up his mind. He is indecisive about what to do with Jesus.

Pilate the interrogator asks no fewer than 10 questions in John's Gospel, all aimed at establishing the true identity of the condemned man in front of him. Pilate's burning issue is encapsulated in the first question he addresses to Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" It's a question about power, about authority. The crowd that brought Jesus into Pilate's presence claims this man has done things he has no right to do. Pilate wants to know what rights Jesus is claiming for himself. Governments are always interested in matters of rights and authority, because naturally they are in the power game themselves.

We have to admit that Jesus does look pathetically weak in this scene, standing with a bloodied and torn robe over His shoulders, and wearing a crown of sharp and unforgiving thorns on His head. Not much of a super-power here.

But looks can be deceiving.

There is so much more anxiety in our world it seems, than ever before. Our culture seems to be heading into a downward spiral of immorality and hatred. War and conflict have gone from identifiable enemies and battlefields to suicide bombers and random terrorist targets. It was very easy to identify our enemies; now they are homegrown anonymously and unassumingly in our very neighborhoods. Violence and murder in our schools are at an all-time high, and even road rage can turn into a homicide.

Where is all of this taking us? What is our Christian response to terrorism and bullying and random violence?

I'll bet you feel a lot like Jesus in today's Gospel; standing before the powers that be, powerless. Today's feast is not about despair and defeat; it's about hope and ultimate victory. Satan may seem to be winning battle after



battle, but Jesus Christ is not only going to be the Ultimate Victor, He already won two thousand years ago. You and I only need to plug into that victory.

During times of great stress and turmoil in the life of Jesus and in our own lives as well, we can experience the greatest sense of the closeness of God.

When the need is the greatest, when we really have to have this spiritual help, God will certainly and eventually extend it to us.

If someone who knew nothing of Christ's Kingdom were to ask you what the Kingdom is, how would you describe your "vision" of it?

God's love is liberating. Where have you felt God's freeing love?

To what do you give your ultimate allegiance -- the Kingdom of God, or the kingdoms of the world?

When we confuse worldly power or prestige with the Cross, we become more like Pilate than Jesus Christ. We become less interested in pursuing truth than the will to power. On this solemnity, let us, as members of the Church, become even more political. But let our politics be founded in the Cross of Our Lord. A politics of love and communion made possible through the self-giving love of the Word made flesh.

Christians -- you and I -- are called to listen to the voice of Jesus and learn where we are going; otherwise we're sure to end up someplace else. As we anticipate Thanksgiving this Thursday, let us truly give thanks to God our help in ages past, and to turn to Him first and always when we need help. Then, as faithful servants of the Kingdom of God, we can use the gifts of God's great Holy Spirit of grace and wisdom with our own sweat equity to renew the face of the earth. We may be carriers of the Kingdom, but thank God we're not the architects. AMEN!

[Readings: Jer 33:14-16; Psalm 25; 1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke: 21:25-28, 34-36]

That was a cheery Gospel, wasn't it?

The season of Advent which we begin today, celebrates the three arrivals ("Adventus" means arrival or coming) of Jesus Christ. His first arrival to us was in human history. He also comes to us now in the mystery of our sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. His arrival in divine majesty and glory at the end of time is what we focus on for the first part of our Advent journey.

Our waiting for the festival of Christmas deepens our preparation for Christ's return in glory. But Advent is also a time of God's waiting. God is waiting for us -- to prepare our hearts, to prepare our minds, to prepare our lives, to prepare our homes for the arrival of God's only Son, Jesus Christ, in the Eucharist of Christmas and at the end of time.

Jesus tells us what to do in today's Gospel: "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life" (Luke 21:34). More teens and young adults are indulging in alcohol, drug abuse and sexual immorality. The age of alcohol, drug and sex abuse is now junior high or even earlier. One third of all live births in our country are to unwed mothers. Socially transmitted diseases are at an all-time high among younger people. But there is a growing "holy remnant" of young people rising up with a new spiritual hunger and a spiritual revival. Some of them are in this parish.

Adults don't get away without guilt or shame. Hundreds of thousands of adults are turning to gambling, compulsive shopping and Internet pornography to fill the emotional holes in their hearts to the point of turning these vices into billion dollar industries. There is more mental illness in our country than in any other country or at any time in our nation's history. And I am speaking about the lack of self-worth, the lack of self-esteem, the lack of self-respect, the anxiety of spreading ourselves too thin, and the pressures that society and our culture puts on us to pull us away from God, from religion, and from our moral and ethical centers. These are the ways of thinking, speaking and acting that weaken our spiritual house from within and make us a less worthy temple for the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul tells us in our Second Reading how to combat this downward spiral of self-destruction and anxiety. As we increase and abound in genuine love and respect for ourselves and for one another and for all, we grow stronger in our life of discipleship. This is the “home improvement” that God rejoices in and brings to completion, in God’s time and in God’s way, for each of us and for the Church as a whole. Does your life and work “abound in love” for others?

What impact does the coming of the Lord have on your daily life? What distracts you from being prepared for his coming? How can you keep these distractions from getting in the way of encountering God?

Waiting is never a passive enterprise. It always involves commitment on our part. For those of you who are parents, do you remember the last month of your pregnancy before your son or daughter was born? What was that last month like for you and your spouse? You were “Preparing the Way!”

Last-minute preparations for a new arrival. Baby clothes, a crib, a changing table, baby formula and baby food. A new space for the baby to sleep and to play. Teaching older siblings how to welcome the New Arrival.

Would any of us call the pizza man for a delivery and then fail to be home when the pie arrives? Would we invite a guest to dinner and then be surprised -- and unprepared -- when they show up? Would we place an order from a catalogue or through the internet and then protest when the credit card comes due? When we say we are waiting for something, we can’t live as if we are waiting for nothing. Our waiting is a dedication. Our Advent waiting dedicates us to the Christ Who is eternally on the way.

My friends, our personal “end time” will come when death claims our own mortal bodies. The visions of today’s Gospel could easily describe our own death. The sun and the stars will be darkened by our own closing eyelids. The world we live in will slip away as we lose the use of our bodily functions.

The chaos and despair of this world may cause us to faint from fear. As people of faith, we remember that what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly. Our salvation indeed is near. Come, Lord Jesus!