

[Readings: Rev. 7:2-4, 9-14; Psalm 24; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12a]

Once upon a time, a fellow finds himself in front of the Pearly Gates at the entrance to Heaven. St. Peter, the porter of the gates, explains that it's not easy to enter into Heaven. "There are some criteria's that must be meet before entry is allowed. For example, were you a church goer or religious?" "No", responded the man. St. Peter told him, "That's bad. Were you generous, giving money to the poor or to charities?" "No," he responded again. This too was bad, said St. Peter. St. Peter then asked him if he did any good deeds, such as helping his neighbor. Anything? Again he said "NO."

St. Peter was becoming concerned. Exasperated, St. Peter says, "Look, everyone does something kind sometime. Work with me, here! I'm trying to help. Now think!" The man thinks for a minute, then says, "Well, I did help this old lady once. I came out of a store and saw that a dozen members of a motorcycle gang had taken her purse and were shoving her around. I threw my bags down and got her purse back, then I told the biggest biker there that he was cowardly and I spat in his face." "WOW," said St. Peter, "That's impressive! When did this happen?" The man looked at his watch and replied, "Oh, about 15 minutes ago."

In *Sister Wendy's Book of Saints*, art historian Sister Wendy Beckett writes about us: "Holiness can so easily appear as something remote from us, to be read about or . . . gazed at, but from afar. Yet to be a saint is a wholly practical and realistic growth into our own truth. It is what we are all meant to become, it is our deepest fulfillment, our own personal realization of what we have been potentially from birth. There is no play about sanctity. *It starts from where we are and what we are.*"

You and I are living between our baptism and our Funeral Mass. Today's Feast of All Saints reminds us of those men, women, young adults and children who have won the crown of eternal life and enjoy seeing and being with God face to face. Today's Feast of All Saints challenges us to move deeper into the saint we were born to be.

In the song, "Abba, Father," we acknowledge that He is the potter and that we are the clay, the work of His hands. We pray that God molds us and fashions us into the very image of Jesus Christ, His Son.

This is the in-between time, the present moment, when the Divine Potter – God – melts us, molds us, shapes us and uses us for His divine purpose, as a potter shapes clay. The potter has a definite design in mind. "What shall I make of this lump of clay?" the Potter asks.

If we are pliable, if we allow ourselves to be shaped by God, we become the precious work of art He wants us to be. If we are stubborn, hardened or uncooperative, the Potter smashes us on the wheel and starts all over. When life smashes us, God's poor but beloved clay, we look to the Potter to help make things right.

St. John reminds us in our Second Reading today that even though we have feet and hearts of clay, we too are sons and daughters of God, His children. NOW! RIGHT NOW!!! So we can call God, "Abba," "Daddy," as well as the Master Potter. We are clay, the work of God's hands.

The Beatitudes which we heard proclaimed in today's Gospel, shows us the method, the "how" of being molded and shaped into God's image and likeness. Realizing our need for God. Being sad with those who are sad. Controlling our ego and pride. Showing mercy. Having only one purpose in life: to know God, to love God, and to serve God. To strive, to celebrate and to serve, as we say in our parish mission statement.

Today's celebration of All Saints is an emphatic reminder that our faith heroes are the people we now honor as saints. Our First Reading from Revelation makes two attempts to give us the number of our "holy heroes." John tells us he "heard the number of those who had been marked by the seal, one hundred and forty-four thousand." This is not a literal number. This multiple of a decade, a dozen and a thousand are numbers signifying completeness and is meant to be all-inclusive. Even if it was to be taken literally, the Roman Catholic Church has officially acknowledged only twelve thousand of them. We still have a way to go!

Then, to make sure that nobody is left out of the count, John writes that he has a "vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue." We cannot possibly know all of them. But it is possible and important that we get to know some of them, even those who lived among us and with us in our time and in our place. Like Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Blessed Fr. Solanus Casey, and 15-year-old Carlo Acutis. Who knows, the list might even include you and me one day! St. Paul calls them "that great cloud of witnesses," men, women, young adults and children interceding for us, cheering us on, and waiting for us to join them one day. AMEN!

[Readings: Wisdom 3:1-9; Psalm 23; Romans 5:5-11; John 6:37-40]

You and I have been blessed with the gift of the friendship of others. Whether in the distant past, the recent past or in our present moments of life, God has blessed us with men and women, young people and children who have made a difference in our lives. It's all about relationship.

And, as with all good and loving relationships, there are times of feeling distant, misunderstood and lonely. That is the ebb and flow of friendship.

There have been two people in my life in particular, that when we are not together, my heart misses them. To share time together. To laugh, to appreciate and to love the other in a moment of pure joy and completeness. When I am less than I should be in loving them, I feel guilt, remorse and pain. One of them died way back in August of 2005; the other just died last month. So I am grieving tonight as many of you here are grieving the loss of a loved one.

The same happens with our relationship with God. We are longing. There is something in our heart, and in our soul that is empty until it is filled with God.

This is what Purgatory is. It is both a process and a state of being when we are somehow not yet totally enveloped by the love of God, or when we are being purified by it. It is not a process of fire and brimstone, some sort of mini-hell that lasts for a certain amount of time. Nor is it a process or state where we are tortured by some sadistic God.

It is a process and a state of existence where the souls of all the people who have died before us prepare for their final union with God. The Church teaches that there is also a Hell, a place of eternal punishment and damnation. But Purgatory is a place of faith and hope. The souls of the faithful departed and we are on our way!

Our faith, our hope and our love say that we are somehow connected with our beloved deceased. That although their physical bodies no longer are with us, their spirit, their soul is somehow connected with us just as strongly as the souls of the Saints, which we celebrated yesterday, are connected with us.

The Church has three neat titles for all three groups of souls: The Church Militant, the Church Suffering and the Church Triumphant.

The Church Militant is you and me, and all Christian believers right here, right now. We are trying to fight the good fight in this world against a culture of death with the virtues and the graces God gives us and we develop as we grow in our spiritual lives. When we die, we sing, "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, the strife is over, the battle is done!"

The Church Suffering are the souls in Purgatory, whom we honor, we remember and for whom we pray on this Feast of the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, All Souls. The Church Triumphant are those souls now in Heaven, enjoying eternal union with God. It's all about relationships.

What unites all of us are faith, hope, love... and prayer. What is prayer? The classic definition of prayer is "talking to and listening to God, and reflecting on God's presence and actions in our lives."

Could we say that our relationships are like prayer? Talking and listening to each other, and reflecting on their presence and actions in our lives? Prayer is happening right here, right now on earth. It is happening in Purgatory, as the fruits of our prayer for the dead hasten their purification and preparation to be with God totally and eternally. Prayer is happening right now in Heaven, where the saints intercede for us with Mary and Jesus to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is the first component of our lives as Christian stewards. If we do not begin and end our day with prayer, if we do not connect with God before making important decisions or testing a relationship with another, we wander aimlessly and arrogantly. This ends only in frustration, confusion and loss.

When we put God first in our lives, we realize the fruitfulness of God working powerfully through the Holy Spirit in every moment, every action. Even if it appears to be a failure or leads to a broken heart. We are doing what God wants us to do at that moment.

Did you know that God answers every prayer with one of these four responses: Yes, I'll get right on it. Or, no, it won't be good for you if I did that. God may say, not yet, you have to be patient a little while longer. Or God may say, No, I Have something better in mind for you!

God always hears our prayers, when prayed with gratitude, and responds in the way that is best for us. Prayer is what will get us through this valley of tears as we remember, as we mourn, as we pray and as we hope. That is why we are here this evening. Prayer is what will get God's attention. Prayer is what will unite the Church – Militant, Suffering and Triumphant.

Praying together here, remembering here, tonight, is a very good start. AMEN!

[Readings: Mal. 1:14b-2:2b, 8-10; Psalm 131; 1 Thess. 2:7b-9, 13; Matt 23-1-12]

As I reflect especially upon our First Reading and Gospel passage this morning, I see in my mind's eye the great Judgment Day. Millions of people are gathered all in one spot – the ancient City of Megiddo, if we believe the movie, The Omen. God comes down from the Heavens on His great Throne, with the Son of God on His right hand, and the Holy Spirit on His left.

His thunderous voice bellows: “All of you, my clergy, gather around at the front of the multitude!” Ever obedient, all the bishops, priests and deacons come to the head of the class. Looking down their noses at the lowly laity, and raising their noses in the air of superiority, they see God the Father gathering up the thunderbolts in His outstretched hands.

Looking back at the crowds and at each other, the clergy say to one another: “They’re gonna get it now!” They snicker as they await Round One of Judgment Day. They look back up at God. Their eyes grow wide as they see God releasing His anger and wrath – at THEM! The thunderbolts burn most of them to a crisp. Not the ending you were expecting, eh?

All of you lay folks – men, women, youth and children who make up what we call the laity – all of you will receive your just desserts at the end of time, for how you lived your lives on earth – good or bad. But we ordained folks are going to have a lot more to answer for. One visionary said a hundred years ago that the road to Hell will be paved with the heads of all the bad clergy of the world who ever lived. YIKES! They did not practice what they preached! Maybe that’s why I have never been a fan of brick pavers with my name on it!

That’s how serious – how deadly serious – we bishops, priests and deacons are to take our call to ordained ministry and our service to God through our ministry and service to you. As you have heard at so many non-Catholic wedding ceremonies, marriage is not something to be entered into lightly. Neither is the call to priesthood or to the permanent diaconate. It comes with a price. But the retirement benefits are “out of this world!” And worth the calling!

Today's readings from both Malachi and Matthew call us ordained men to a renewal of priestly integrity. A renewal of the gift of one's very self, working day and night, as health permits! The truly good bishop, priest or deacon sees their lifestyle as that of a gentle, nursing mother – protecting and nurturing the spiritual children God gives them.

That is the best compliment I have been given as a priest: that something inspired by the Holy Spirit that I said or did brought someone closer to God, closer to their faith, closer to the Church. I read many of those kinds of testimonials you write in your cards and notes to me for Priesthood Sunday and my birthday. It is that positive affirmation that you give me which sustains me in darker days. Thank you.

The worthiness of being a priest, the worthiness of being a son or daughter of God, is something we never earn. It is given to us freely, generously and lovingly by God, through the constant interaction of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul says in today's Second Reading, "is now at work in you who believe."

Today's Gospel reading contains a verse that, when taken literally, has been used by some Protestants to condemn Catholicism because we call our priests "Father." By that logic, when Jesus said, "Call no one on earth your father," He meant our dads, too, right? Did He never call St. Joseph by the title "father?" Perhaps when Jesus as a lad had a question about carpentry He said, "Hey dude who's married to Mom!" I don't think so. He called him Abba. Daddy.

To understand what Jesus means in this scripture, we need to read the whole passage: This singled-out verse is actually part of a teaching about equality. He is telling us that we must not consider anyone to be superior to ourselves -- no one but God is superior to us. Remember then that in all of this, the emphasis is NOT on our unworthiness. None of us is truly worthy. Beginning with me. Rather, our worthiness relies on our faith in Jesus Christ! God's grace given in the sacrament of the Eucharist is a gift. We only need to respond to and accept this gift, and live it out. Blessed indeed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb! And to live out that holiness in our daily lives in service. AMEN!

[Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16; Ps. 63; 1 Thess.4:13-18; Matt. 25:1-13]

Boy, do the Readings today hit home, right? Especially today's Gospel: "Therefore, stay awake, for you know not the day nor the hour."

Fr. Jim Bjorum. His death. Sr. Pat Whalen. Her stroke.

Today's readings speak of wisdom, the end times and to be prepared.

When I am ready to leave my man-cave for another day of ministry and service, I still ask the Holy Spirit to give me the wisdom to make the right decisions, to say the right words and to act as Jesus would have me act. I still ask for "an understanding heart" when confronted with the day's challenges. Wisdom is "waiting by the gate," ready to be "readily perceived by those who love her," and hastens to those who seek and desire her. If you ask God for it, and are silent enough to hear it, God will give you the wisdom you need!

Wisdom is presented as a lady in the Hebrew tradition. In books like Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon, she makes her rounds, inviting all who are alert to join her at her table and learn from her good counsel. Wisdom doesn't only speak; she acts. She creates, saves, and directs human history.

During the month of November, Catholics turn their thoughts and reflections to the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. St. Paul adds his "Nick"el's Worth about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in today's Second Reading. Are we ready for that day? What will that look like? Because as Jesus tells us in today's Gospel: we do not know the day or the hour.

Trying to figure out all of this, and trying to cope with all of life's trials with the endurance of faith, we have a powerful advocate in Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Seat of Wisdom. Of all Mary's many titles, I have some favorites. One of them is Mary, Untier of Knots. Because that's usually what I need her for. A mom to get me out of jams. After all, she's like the wise virgins ready with oil for their lamps for the unexpected arrival of the bridegroom, while I'm like the ones running last minute to get some.

I turn to Mary, Untier of Knots for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual healing. I pray that I may be utterly released and unburdened.

In that moment, I like to thank Mary for helping me to work through the knots I create in my life and for always giving me the sweet relief of her unbounded love for untying the knots given to me by others or just by life itself.

St. Bonaventure once wrote: "When Mary holds you up, you do not fall; when she protects you, you need not fear; when she leads you, you do not tire; and when she is favorable to you, you arrive at the harbor of safety.

*This week's reflection questions:*

What are YOUR most reliable sources of wisdom? Do you seek out these resources (human and otherwise) as often as you should? What lessons have you learned? What piece of wisdom can you count on no matter what happens?

As you wait for the coming of the Lord, in what ways do you see the Lord is already near and feel the Lord's presence?

What are the cares that are uppermost in your mind right now?

When I was a child, our parish priest used to say, "Don't wait till you die to go to Heaven." This is the spirit of end-times that won't occur only at the end of the line. Purgation, preparing our souls for Heaven, is something we consciously choose now, just as we might also choose the way of justice, peace, joy, gratefulness, humility, and love.

We don't have to worry about the so-called Rapture, salvation and damnation, Heaven and Hell, and what's going to happen after we die. What rightfully concerns us is the choices we're making in the present hour, the oil we have in our lamps today, and whether we seek and carry the Bridegroom in our hearts. If we are in Christ TODAY, we are in Christ forever. AMEN!



[Readings: Prov. 31: 10-13, 19-20, 30-31; Ps. 128, 1-5a; 1 Thess. 5:1-6; Matt.25:15-30]

Jesus is talking to us in a parable today. He tells a story to make a point, to teach us something. His point? "Take the risk!"

Matthew uses the term "talent" to describe the monetary unit the wealthy man is giving his servants. What is a "talent?"

Depending on which biblical commentary you read, it is an amount of money equal to one year's salary, or a half-year's salary. Think about this for a moment. What is your annual income? How much money is that? Now, multiply that amount by five. Or multiply it by two. For most of us that would be our entire life's savings.

To one servant the wealthy man gives five year's worth of his salary, another, two year's worth, and to the third, one year's worth.

Another way of looking a "talent" is that special gift or ability God gives us. Why is life like that? We are all equal in the eyes of God, right? We are all guaranteed equal rights under the Constitution.

But when it comes to our talents and abilities, God simply did not make us all the same. There are some people who can handle five talents; there are some who can handle only one or two. Some work with their academics; others work with the skill of their hands.

There are some who are musical or artistic, or handy in the repair shop, in the kitchen or in spiritual direction. There are some who have physical athletic ability and attractive looks, and there are some who do not. My talents are my love for words and my humor.

The important thing to remember is that each of us, servants of the Lord like the three men in the Gospel, is given something. No one is rejected or forgotten. You may not be a five-talent person, but you have some talent. I think that there are a whole lot more one- and two- talent people in this world than there are five-talent people. Take the risk and use them. Don't be "lazy and wicked" and bury them!

A mother was afraid when her little girl said that there were tryouts for the kindergarten play. She knew her daughter couldn't remember her lines or sing well, or pretend to be something she wasn't. Imagine Mom's surprise when her little girl comes home from school skipping with a big smile. Mom asks, "What is YOUR talent, honey, in the play?" The little girl jumps up and down and says, "My teacher said that at the end of the play, I get to jump up and down and clap and cheer!"

Regardless of the number of talents you and I have, all of us Catholic believers are called to be "church cheerleaders!"

What are we doing with our talents? Are we taking the risk?

In our First Reading we hear about the blessing of worthy wife and mother. These words we hear today are, in the Orthodox Jewish religion, to be said by a husband every week at Sabbath prayer, and are sung on the day of her funeral. So, husbands, take the hint! Tell your wife all the beautiful things about her that you love about her at least once a week. Don't wait until the day of HER funeral!

What talents are needed to be a good parent or a good spouse? We can boil it down to three things: the talent of Faith, the

talent of Hope, and the talent of Love. We have been given all three.

First, the Talent of Faith. A daily life without God is a life without sunshine, without true meaning. We will look for that meaning in all the wrong places and never find it. St. Augustine once said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You." Share your faith.

Secondly, the good parent, the good spouse is a person of Hope. In today's Second Reading, Paul reminds us that the Lord is coming. In this letter, Paul thinks Jesus is coming back soon. In time, he will learn to think in God's time, not in our time. The person of hope learns about the Catholic faith and passes it on to their spouse and children. Share your hope.

Finally, a good spouse and parent is a person of Love. Do you know that there are some people who light up a room just by walking into it? Unfortunately, there are also people who light up a room right after leaving it! Glowing with the love of Jesus means that people can turn to us in their need. They can become friends with us. They can trust us and we can trust them. Share your love.

Our best friends help to get us into Heaven, and we help them to get into Heaven. Faith, Hope and Love are three talents God gives to all of us. We just need to tap into them and use them, with the help of our friends on earth, and our oldest and newest friends in Heaven. AMEN!

[Readings: Sirach 50:22-24, Psalm 138, 1 Cor. 1:3-9, Luke 17:11-19]

Most of us were toddlers when we learned to say “please” and “thank you.” We were a little older when we fell into the habit of asking, begging, nagging, whining, “Please, please, please, please, ple-e-e-e-e-ease!”

Older still when we began to try bargaining. If you give me this ...” “If you let me do that ...” Then, “I’ll never ask for anything else again.” (Yeah, sure.) “I’ll do my homework right after ...” (Insert laugh here.)

Perhaps not surprisingly, our relationship with God tended to follow the same track. Almost always ready, willing and able to ask politely. More than a little slow with the thank-you note. If we even remembered to write it and mail it. Or email it. Or text it. If we even remembered to say it with more than a passing “thank you” in the same tone and sincerity we may have used in years gone by when our mother would pointedly ask, “What do you say?”

So how do we — how can we — sincerely say “thanks” to our Heavenly Father? Well, thankfully our Creator has given us many ways to do just that. Journalist Bob Dodds from Our Sunday Visitor suggests are seven of them. See which ones you can do.

**1. GO TO MASS.** NO DOUBT YOU KNOW THE WORD “EUCHARIST” IS FROM THE GREEK FOR “THANKSGIVING” OR “GRATITUDE.” BUT, OF COURSE, UPPERCASE-“E” EUCHARIST REFERS TO MASS AND THE BLESSED SACRAMENT. WHEN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ASKS “WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?” ITS FIRST ANSWER IS “EUCHARIST, BECAUSE IT IS AN ACTION OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD.” GREAT! GO TO MASS. A DONE DEAL. NEXT.

It’s an action of thanksgiving, which certainly implies us doing something there besides stand, sit, kneel, walk up for Communion, stay for a closing hymn and head out the door. Without our actively taking part in the Mass — praying with others, offering our own private prayers, reverently receiving the Blessed Sacrament, joining in the singing — then we’re pretty much like that child blurting a fast and nearly thoughtless “thank you” to appease Mom.

2. DO WHAT JESUS TOLD US TO DO. UH OH. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US? YES, HE SAID TAKE PART IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD IN MEMORY OF HIM (LK 22:19), BUT HE ALSO MENTIONED SOMETHING ABOUT “LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU” (JN 13:34). WHAT BETTER WAY TO SHOW GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT OF FAITH THAN TO LIVE THE FAITH? HOW DO WE LIVE IT? LOVE AS JESUS LOVED. AND HOW DO WE DO THAT? FIND OUT BY SPENDING SOME TIME THIS YEAR — EACH MONTH, EACH WEEK, EACH DAY — READING ABOUT HOW HE DID IT. SPEND TIME “PRAYING” THE GOSPELS.

Then, too, living the Faith — living our gratitude to God — means living the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Sometimes that can be particularly challenging, but other times it’s pretty simple. Small choices throughout the day can develop over time into virtuous habits that make us more inclined and better prepared to tackle those challenging opportunities.

3. DON’T PUT A GIFT FROM GOD IN YOUR SOCK DRAWER. WHAT? SOMETIMES WE RECEIVE A GIFT FROM A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND AND QUIETLY TUCK IT AWAY IN A DRESSER DRAWER. IT’S NOT SOMETHING WE NEED, WANT, KNOW HOW TO USE OR EVEN LIKE. WHEN WE DO THAT WITH A GIFT FROM GOD IT RUNS COUNTER TO WHAT JESUS TAUGHT IN THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (MT 25:14-30). THE LESSON? USE WHAT GOD GIVES YOU. PAY ATTENTION TO THE TALENTS GOD HAS GIVEN YOU, DEVELOP THEM, AND USE THEM TO HELP OTHERS.

4. SAY ‘THANK YOU’ TO OTHERS ... AND MEAN IT. CONSIDER THIS: IN DESCRIBING THE LAST JUDGMENT, JESUS SAID, “WHAT YOU DID NOT DO FOR ONE OF THESE LEAST ONES, YOU DID NOT DO FOR ME” (MT 25:45). SO PART OF WHAT YOU CAN EASILY DO FOR OTHERS THROUGHOUT THIS NEW YEAR, WHICH IS THIS GIFT FROM GOD, IS THANK THEM. “THANK YOU” TO THE STORE CLERK. YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER. THE SUNDAY HOMILIST. AND ON AND ON.

5. WRITE IT DOWN. THIS MAKES A GREAT NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION. ONE THAT’S EASY TO KEEP TRACK OF. AND HARD TO CHEAT ON.

Even those who hold little stock in religion or spirituality have discovered keeping a daily journal or log of people, events and things for which they’re grateful helps them mentally and physically.

You — lucky you, thank God — have that added layer or, more accurately, that foundation of Catholicism. Jotting down a few things at the end of every day can be a prayer of thanksgiving. Why? Because you know the source of all goodness, blessings, grace and love.

6. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. NOT TAKING YOUR HEALTH FOR GRANTED IS A KEY WAY OF THANKING GOD FOR THE PRICELESS GIFT THAT IS GOOD HEALTH. SOMETIMES THAT'S RELATIVELY SIMPLE. PAYING A BIT MORE ATTENTION TO INCLUDING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN YOUR DIET. FLOSSING. CUTTING BACK ON SCREEN TIME TO GET MORE SACK TIME.

But sometimes taking care of yourself can take a lot of effort, such as getting into a program that helps a person overcome an addiction. Going to a mental health professional to learn how to better handle past or current issues that can be physically, mentally or emotionally crippling is also a good step.

Taking care of yourself also means going to confession. Sometimes that's simple; sometimes so very, very difficult. Turning to God in that way is a form of self-care that can be easily overlooked but it's one that has, well, eternal consequences. What a great way to thank God for your immortal soul.

7. Avoid ingratitude Try to be thankful and not fall into the habit of feeling like "I deserve this." Thank God that God doesn't give us what we deserve!

And, if I may add, a P.S. Thank God for the bad times as well as the good times. There's no way bad can be good, right? Except ... if "God writes straight with crooked lines," perhaps there's something he can do, something he is doing, with and through what you're suffering today. This isn't to say any of us love the hard and horrible times. Jesus didn't. Just as we do, he wanted out of his. "He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will'" (Mt 26:39).

Yes, he knew what would come from it — our redemption — but that didn't take away the pain of his passion and death.

So what's that other facet of your particular cross?

Your suffering can be a form of prayer, a uniting of yourself more closely to Christ crucified. It can be a gift of deep, beefy prayers for others. One you

don't want but one that is far from useless. One that even if you're sick, elderly, disabled or frail proves you're far from "useless," no matter what others may think. No matter what you may sometimes feel.

There are lessons and truths, there are depths of spirituality that can only be learned by going through, by living with, hard times. There can be unmatched prayers. There can be many astounding graces.

But ...

All that being said, sometimes it can help — tongue-in-cheek — to acknowledge, "God never gives us more than we can handle ... but sometimes He seems to overestimate how much we can take!

In the spirit of Thanksgiving, here is a reflection attributed to [Blessed Solanus Casey](#), the Capuchin friar who served in Detroit for 20 years and who was beatified in 2017 in Detroit:

"Let us thank Him at all times and under whatever circumstances. Thank Him for our creation and our existence, thank Him for everything — for His plans in the past that by our sins and our want of appreciation and patience have so often been frustrated and that He so often found necessary to change. Let us thank Him for all His plans for the future — for trials and humiliations as well as great joy and consolations; for sickness and whatever death He may design to plan ... Thank Him ahead of time for whatever He foresees." AMEN!

[Readings: Ezekiel 34: 11-17; Psalm 23; I Cor 15:20-28; Matthew 25:31-46]

In general, there are two ways that we can approach life. Two very simple ways, “My Kingdom come, my will be done,” or “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.” I don’t know about you, but in my 69 years, I have tried to approach life a lot as “My kingdom come, my will be done.” I have learned that any time I do that, life gets pretty frustrating. Life can be pretty miserable when we constantly want to have life on our terms. The sad thing is, when we try to have life on our terms, the vision to the kingdom, my kingdom, is so small to what God wants His Kingdom to be in our world.

We have two ways to approach suffering as well. The reality is, we all experience suffering in this life. I want you to think about that. Are you experiencing any suffering right now? It could be anything: emotional, physical, spiritual, relationships, family, or friendships. Are you experiencing any suffering? There are two ways to approach it, “My will be done, my kingdom come,” or “Thy will be done come, Thy Kingdom come.” Think about that for a moment. Then also think about what we are celebrating today.

Today is the 34<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. This last Sunday of Ordinary Time is also called the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe. The First Reading from the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel pre-figures Jesus as the Good Shepherd. “I myself will look after and tend my sheep.”

The Second Reading from the New Testament First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians makes reference to the Eternal Kingdom Jesus Christ will establish for all people for all time. The last thing to be subject is death. Then He will return all things seen and unseen back to the Father. All will be in Him.

The Gospel for today’s feast challenges us as to whether we are the fit or unfit servants of the King of the Universe. How do WE proclaim the Kingdom of God by our thoughts, words and deeds? We will have to stand in judgement before the King of the Universe and face the consequences of our choices and our behavior on earth. “Whatever you did to my least ones, you did it to Me.”



God has it all. He is King of it all. He is in control of it all.

But notice that today's Gospel, although Jesus is throned in all of his glory, He measures our lives by humility and service. It is not worldly might and power that will get us into Heaven, but spiritual humility and worldly service "Whatever you did to one of my least ones, you did it to ME."

In the meantime, how do we handle our day-to-day minor and major problems? Your problems are not really that big when it comes to God. My problems, when it comes to God, are really not that big. God can handle them. He has the whole universe to handle. He can handle your problems. He can handle my problems. Just think about that. Whatever your problems are, whatever your struggles are, whatever your issues are, the King can handle it. He's got your back. As we learned last Sunday, God has given us all different talents. God does help us use those talents to get us through life. The difficulties come when we try to do life on our own terms or by ourselves.

There is a prayer I learned many years ago. It is one of the three prayers I pray before leaving the man-cave at the rectory: "Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today, that together, you and I can't handle." Whatever you are suffering right now, whatever your struggles, whatever your difficulties are, that is your cross. You did not get to choose it, but you are nailed to it. You have two ways of approaching it. "Lord get me down from this cross, save me." "My will be done, my kingdom come." Or, on the other hand, accept it, "Your will be done. Your Kingdom come." Blessed Solanus Casey puts it this way: "Let us thank God at all times and under whatever circumstances. Thank Him for our creation and our existence, thank Him for everything -- for His plans in the past that by our sins and our lack of appreciation and patience have so often been frustrated and that He so often found necessary to change. Let us thank Him for all His plans for the future -- for trials and humiliations as well as great joys and consolations; for sickness and whatever death He may design to plan... Thank God ahead of time for whatever He foresees." AMEN!