

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 22nd SUNDAY (B)

Deut. 4: 1-2, 6-8 PS. 15 James 1: 17-18, 21b-22, 27 Mk. 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTE:

We have posted, “The Economic Crisis – A Call to Conversion,” by Sr. Brenda Walsh, OP on our webpage. Go to www.judeop.org and click on “Justice Preaching.”

I know a family whose members treasure the memory of their deceased aunt – we’ll call her Aunt Mary. She was a single woman who had a very basic education. During years of hard work and frugal living she was able to put some money aside. She was generous throughout her lifetime with her savings. She helped many family members: the newly married who needed money for a mortgage; a nephew struggling to pay for law school; a widowed sister who needed help with the rent, etc. She was known in her family for her generosity, which she did without fanfare and many times anonymously.

Aunt Mary was generous outside her family as well, giving to people she heard about who had need. During her lifetime her generosity was admired by and a challenge to those who did know about it. Her reputation for generosity lived on after she died. One of her nieces once said, “I’ll always remember what Aunt Mary said, ‘If you have money how can you not give it to someone who doesn’t?’” Aunt Mary left a legacy, and it wasn’t just the money she gave to those who needed it. Her example and words became a model and challenge for others. “If you have, how can you not give to someone who doesn’t?” It wasn’t a commandment the family had to follow, it was something they wanted to do to honor a beloved family member – practice generosity the way Aunt Mary did.

The Deuteronomy passage is another family story. Moses is talking to the Israelites on the plains of Moab. The whole book of Deuteronomy is a sermon he delivers to them. The Israelites have just completed their long journey through the desert with its daily and long hardships on the road to freedom. Moses is giving them advice before they enter the Promise Land: they are to, “hear the statutes and decrees.” It’s what we expect from a religious leader, isn’t it – rules of behavior, ways to please the Divine?

But that's not what Moses is teaching; we don't keep commandments to win God's favor and please God. Moses is saying that God is like Aunt Mary, who loved and helped her family when they were too young to return the love or to broke to pay back the gifts. The Israelites had received gifts from God – freedom from slavery, daily nourishment and protection along their escape route – out of God's generosity and love. God did these wonderful deeds because of God's love for the Israelites, not because they deserved it, but because God wanted to do good things for them.

The Israelites didn't look at commandments as onerous, something they were pressured to do. Rather, God was like Aunt Mary who said, "If you have something, how could you not share it with someone who doesn't?" Those in Aunt Mary's family who benefited from her generosity were inspired by her spirit and wanted to reflect it in their lives. That's the way it is with God.

We don't always live up to who we are and who we want to be; we don't always reflect the God who stood by us with forgiveness and generosity in hard times. But Jesus did. He was the image and likeness of our generous God who rescued the Israelites from slavery – and who, through Jesus, delivers us from our slavery and addictions. Jesus lived in the way God wants us all to live. As the Bible tells us, he "fulfilled the Law."

If the Pharisees and scribes who challenged Jesus about his disciples' non-observance of the eating rituals, had been in Aunt Mary's family, they would have wanted rules and regulations about how much each family member was to donate to those in need. They would have made lists of givers and receivers; determined who was to receive how much and they would have determined the percentage of a family member's resources that would go to charity. They would have been very thorough. And if they had the authority, they probably would have enforced the regulations. That's just the way it is when some people are in control. The pressured family members might have observed the rules of giving, but the process would have killed the spirit of Aunt Mary. In truth, Mary's family members imitated her generosity, not because there were rules about it, but because she touched their lives and they caught her spirit. They gifted others freely, in "the spirit of Aunt Mary."

Which is what some of the Pharisees and scribes failed to do in observing and pressuring others to follow the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees get a bad reputation in

the Gospels and are often caricatured. But their intentions were good: to protect and preserve the integrity of the Law, applying it to daily life. In the process some got carried away and misplaced the spirit of the Law and, as in today's gospel, became preoccupied about externals.

Jesus attacks their misplaced emphasis and their way of structuring life. Today's passage comes between two multiplication stories, which manifested his overflowing concern for people. The Pharisees, on the other hand, have a restrictive view, showing a preoccupation with minutia – washing hands and utensils for eating. The Pharisees got sidetracked as they tried to be the holy people God called them to be.

No one can deny Jesus's desire to form a holy people; but he says that has nothing to do with exterior legal observances. The interior of a person must be transformed first, then the proper exterior practices will flow naturally – the way, I suppose, Aunt Mary's family was affected and changed by her generosity.

It's the grace that comes to those who believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that effects real transformation in a person. Touched by that grace and accepting the new life it brings, makes a person say something like Aunt Mary's family said, "How can we not forgive and be generous to others, when in Jesus, God has been so forgiving and generous towards us?"

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Deuteronomy reading:

Moses said to the people...

"For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord our God, is to us whenever we call upon God?"

Reflection:

Moses is reminding the Israelites that they had received gifts from God – freedom from slavery, daily nourishment and protection along their escape route. God did these wonderful deeds because of God's love for the Israelites, not because they deserved it, but because God wanted to do good things for them – as God wants to

do for us.

So, we ask ourselves:

- Can I remember a time when I was in a personal desert and experienced God's strong and loving presence?
- For whom can I be that strong and loving presence now?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only...”(James 1:22)

“If there is among you anyone in need, a member of the community in any of your towns ... open your hand, willingly lending

enough to meet the need whatever it may be.” (*Deuteronomy 15:7-8*)

September is

National Hunger Awareness Month

Join the H2O for Hunger Challenge

For **one week** in September, Catholic Charities challenges you to **drink safe tap water** instead of soda, juice, coffee, tea, beer, wine and other alcoholic beverages to commemorate ***National Hunger Awareness Month***. The money you save for one week will help feed one hungry family. This is a great way for you and your family to “*be doers of the word and not hearers only*”.

Set aside the money you save each time you drink a glass of water ***instead*** of your preferred beverage. At the end of the week put your savings together and send it to *Catholic Charities* to feed the hungry. Here are some examples:

H2O for Hunger Savings Examples

Beverage Cost Per Serving Times Skipped= Savings

Soda or juice 1.00 5 \$5.00

Coffee 2.00 5 \$10.00

Tea 2.00 5 \$10.00

Beer/Wine 4.00 5 \$20.00

Bottled Water 1.00 5. \$5.00

TOTAL SAVINGS FOR ONE WEEK \$50.00

Did you know?

In North Carolina...

- A child is born into poverty every 19 minutes.
- 19.5% of all children are considered poor.
- 8.4 % of children are living in extreme poverty.
- Nearly 1 million children participate in the Free School Lunch Program (resource- www.childrensdefense.org)

What can I do?

- Join H2O for Hunger and see how one little sacrifice on your part can feed an entire family for one week. It's easy. It's short. ***It's about loving your neighbor.***
- Mail your contribution to:

Catholic Parish Outreach (CPO)

2013 N. Raleigh Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27604.

For more information go to www.cporaleigh.org

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, *"People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."* If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Allen Holmen #0587681 (On death row since 4/7/98)
- Timmy Grooms #0158506 (4/24/99)
- Tilmon Golphin #0590940 (5/13/98)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

Jude Siciliano, OP

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