

Eleventh Sunday after Trinity
August 11, 2013
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 12:32-48

I marveled this past week at how much we've been given lately. While it's true our parish has had to say good-bye to the families who are moving away this summer, we have also been blessed with two new babies this month. My daughter, Monica, was born on the first and the Josefeks welcomed their fourth son this past Wednesday. Of course, you can see we welcomed our St. Joseph statue, as well. He finally arrived Monday morning, and we will dedicate that gift next Sunday at Mass. And just yesterday we saw the largest attendance we have ever had at our parish picnic. One hundred people came to Lackawanna State Park to enjoy a beautiful day swimming, boating and just generally enjoying each other's company. August has been a month of one blessing after another.

But we've also been given more responsibility. Msgr. Steenson wrote the clergy of the Ordinariate to inform us of a change to the laws that govern our jurisdiction, a change made by Pope Francis himself. Starting now, our job is not only to reconcile our separated brothers to Holy Mother Church or to make new converts for her. Pope Francis has also determined that anybody who completes the sacraments of initiation through the ministry of an Ordinariate parish can now be a member of the Ordinariate.

This new rule is directed at the thousands upon thousands of people who were baptized in the Catholic Church but then never received First Holy Communion or Confirmation. It even applies to those who received baptism and First Holy Communion, but were never confirmed. In a place like Scranton, where 75% of the population self-identifies as Catholic, this greatly expands the potential roster of those who can join our parish. But it also means that in a certain sense we have a responsibility to them, a responsibility to reach out to more than just former Protestants, to begin to call back Catholics that have fallen away.

I thought of our many blessings juxtaposed with this brand new responsibility when I read the last verse of today's Gospel: "Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more." Naturally this has to do with all people who have received the entire deposit of faith, but it applies to us in a particular way precisely because of how blessed we have been since the day of our inception nearly nine years ago. We have been given so much that we have more to give back.

We have a program to implement that over time will win the conversion of many souls to the Faith, just as many of us have come into the Church through this parish's ministry. And we are going to continue to work towards the establishment of a school and the transformation of this neighborhood by our presence within it. But even as we are true to what the future holds, we can share our gifts with others on a daily basis.

I began thinking about the gift of our faith after three different people told me about a story now making national news. At the scene of a car accident in northern Missouri a Catholic priest appeared, anointed the victim who was trapped in her car, prayed with the first responders, and then vanished. The road to the site was blocked in both directions, so several of the people who witnessed

these ministrations now wonder whether this may have been an angel in human vesture. Whether or not he is in fact an angel, the family desires to thank him; for as soon as he was finished, the victim was freed from the wreck after an hour-long struggle, and she is now expected to recover.

That this is now a national news story indicates how far we as a people have drifted from the daily experience of faith. Indeed, this sort of thing happens in my orbit fairly regularly. And I think this is true of many of my brother clergy, as well. To illustrate this, I will tell you a story from less than a year ago.

Last October, Don and Judy Sanderson invited me to the Luzerne County Chapter of Pennsylvania for Human Life's annual dinner. Our friend, Jim Burke, who has been to Mass here, was the speaker, and in the middle of his remarks he collapsed. While we sat stunned at the table, a doctor on the dais with Jim began performing CPR. While dozens began praying the Rosary, I ran out to my car to get my oil for the sacrament of the sick, recognizing that Jim might well be dying. As I got back to the ballroom, Mr. Burke was being loaded on the ambulance. I asked the doctor who performed CPR if Jim had been anointed, and he told me, "Yes, Bishop Bambera did it." The Bishop of Scranton was on the dais with Jim and had had his oils on his very person. I was too late only because another priest had already gotten there. Jim Burke left the hospital a few days later.

I could keep going and tell you story after story of how God's grace was evident as events transpired, how in so many cases there can be no explanation for what went down other than God's providence. And I'm sure that you can, also. But we need to tell those stories more often, to our friends, our neighbors, our relatives. Because the media is treating this incident in Missouri as if it is unusual. It's interesting, it's beautiful, it may even be miraculous; but it is not unusual.

Those of us blessed with the gift of faith, for whom no explanation is needed, who understand that of course God's hand was responsible for that young woman's rescue, need to share with the world stories of our own experience of God's grace. We have been given much, which means much will be required of us. The Lord will ask us whether we shared our experiences of His grace. The Lord requires that we use our gift of faith to inspire faith in others. The story of this rescue in Missouri is a great opportunity to remind our neighbors that such things happen here in Scranton. God is active here, too.

But also notice that Jesus says men will demand the more. When we begin to share our stories of faith with our neighbors, with those we love, we will see that our responsibility to bring them into the Church will become easier. When their faith is inspired, they will want it to mature. They will want it to increase. And this can be the occasion for an invitation to them, to show them where your own faith is nurtured, where you see God's blessings come down every day, and where there is grace to spare for all who desire it.