

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

I feel called to begin with a confession. I detest Stewardship Sundays. So often it is all about how much the church needs the money. There are spread sheets which highlight the vast gulf between income and expenditures in an ecclesiastical version of Mr. Micawber's definition of misery. Need for a new furnace, failing lighting, collapsing drains, it all comes up or down. Members of the congregation lose heart and go home in a dull mood and probably fly to the bottle for the spiritual comfort they didn't receive in church. Meanwhile the parish leadership sits around disconsolate at the poor results wondering why it didn't work.

So that is why when John and I agreed to co-ordinate the 2024 Stewardship Campaign just 10 days or so ago, we asked to launch it on what is Remembrance Sunday because there is no better way to honour the sacrifices of those who have gone before, than to commit to God's work in the present and to build for its future.

I believe we do well from time-to-time to really stop and reflect on all too familiar words and consider what they really mean to us now, where we are, in whatever stage of life we are. As Christians, no words merit more regular reflection than the words of the Shema. We will say them shortly after I finish this homily, they are on page 5 of your bulletin.

So what about the first and greatest commandment and the second like unto it. What does it mean for you and for me now? It may well now be different than once it was, not better, not worse, just different, as is so much of life as years pass.

What do the first and second commandments really mean? Whence do they come?

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

You will recall that in Matthew 22 the Pharisees challenge Jesus with the question: "What commandment of the law is the greatest?" He replied with what the Jews know as the Shema literally translated "hear". You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. The language of the Shema is taken from Deuteronomy and Numbers. The Shema itself was used in the temple in Jerusalem during the first millennium before the common era. It was traditionally used in both morning and evening prayer and as the climax of the service on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. It was and is often used by Jews as their last words before their death. Our Lord's answer to the Pharisees was doctrinally irrefragable.

So what does it mean: The key is with what do you love your God? With all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. In Hebrew, heart is leiv. It means both thought and

emotion – an unconditional acceptance of God’s teaching. Soul is nephesh. It means one’s life force not only of oneself, but of one’s progeny. Mind is me’od, but again it means more than just mind, it means might and strength and it also means resources including money. The subtle differences between Hebrew words and English words is why we have four: heart, soul, mind, and strength while they have just the three: leiv, nephesh, and me’ od

Our Lord goes on from the Shema to add, You shall love your neighbour as yourself, from the 17th verse of Leviticus 19. Equally irreproachable doctrinally. It is part of God’s instructions to Moses: You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord. The statement at the end of the sentence from the Great I Am: I am the Lord is meant as a powerful affirmation of the point made. Don’t mess with God.

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

So we now know with what we should love God and Neighbour but what does it mean to love and why is that important on a Sunday when we commit ourselves to prayerfully examining what out of all we have been given – time, abilities, and resources – will we give back to express our love of God and Neighbour in this place.

If we have eyes to see or hearts to feel, we all have experienced the unlimited outpouring of the love of God especially those of us who live in this beautiful corner of God’s world in a land at peace. God’s unconditional outpouring of love models the love we should have for family, friends, and neighbour. The most singular characteristic of God’s love is that it is not transactional. It is not about getting; it is only about giving. God asks nothing in return except that, as we can, we pass it on.

In English in addition to God there are two “G’s” essential for psychic and spiritual health: Gratitude and Giving.

In our relationships we know we receive many gifts, but if we have gratitude, it is in the giving of at least as much as we get that we grow and are become whole.

Let me suggest two scenarios to you. I venture to guess that we all have known people who fit in each of them.

Number One: There is a person who has a very good job with a very high salary. That person has a very nice house, but it is not waterfront; a very expensive car, but only one; stays in four-star hotels, but not five-star; loves Burgundy wine, but can only afford Premier Cru not Grand Cru. All the time our person scrambles like Sisyphus pushing his rock up hill to try to catch up with people perceived to have more. In fact, our person has everything, except

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

gratitude; therefore, it is as though our person has worse than nothing.

Scenario Two: There is a couple. They seem to be well suited to each other, but over time it becomes apparent that partner A does everything: contributes more income, does much more work around the house, takes greater responsibility for children, ensures things like bill payments happen on time, negotiates with tradespeople, keeps track of all the family records, and on and on and on. Meanwhile Partner B ensures that he or she is rested, has a chance to pursue out-of-home interests, provides occasional treats that may or not meet actual needs, plays good cop with any children. After some time, they part and a full severing follows. Which partner in this scenario is the more damaged? If you guess Partner B, I think you are right. Partner A may be tired and worn out, but he or she is not psychically or spiritually damaged. But partner B has not grown in relationship, has not experienced what it is to be an adult, has not learned to move out of comfort zones, has not developed a sense of other, has not learned to give. Partner B is a half-person and not even the better half. Many of you know I have been married to Ron for 41 years and counting. For all that he has given me and done for me in those 4 plus decades, and it's a lot, I am profoundly grateful. But I am even more grateful for the opportunity to have given to him, because it is in that giving I have become opened, have had my rough edges smoothed, and have grown in heart and mind and soul. Had I only received, as wonderful as the gifts have been, I would be a seriously damaged man today.

Please do not imagine that I am saying such opening to giving can only happen in an intimate relationship like a marriage. But, I am convinced that it can only happen in relationships that takes one out

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

of oneself. There are many possible relationships in which that could happen including ones experienced by mystics with such a deep, intimate relationship with God; it can also happen with our relationship with our faith community. But I am convinced that we cannot become open and giving without profound gratitude as our foundation.

If we can be grateful for what we have received, we open up a tremendous capacity to give, and giving is how we make God's love manifest to our neighbour whether next door or across the world. That is all God asks of us.

The message of our Gospel reading today which many of us know as the widow's mite is that the gratitude that enables our giving is not tied to the size of what has come our way. The widow gives all that

she can and more than is “wise” in the world’s terms out of nothing more than thankfulness for what she has, as little as it is. Jesus uses her example to challenge those who have so much more – among others, us!

Giving of course is about money, but oh so much more. How much time to give to the love of God and Neighbour? What special abilities with which we have been endowed do we devote to making things better for others? And yes what of our material well-being will we sacrifice for God and our neighbours. There is no formula about relative proportions of time, talent, and money. Some will have lots of all three to return, others will have limited capacity in one or more. There is no standard formula beyond from each according to what each is given. That is the message from the widow’s mite, it is the acts of generosity and sacrifice that matter. And let us be clear, they matter to our own spiritual health more than they matter to those who may be in receipt of our gifts.

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

No one would say that the church doesn’t have needs, but those needs are only important if meeting them equips the faithful to love God and neighbour more fully. I need to give, and if my giving through my parish provides greater leverage, scope, and reach in service to God and neighbour then all is well.

At the end of the day, if this parish had millions of dollars in endowments producing income each year that covered all our costs including many paid staff to accomplish everything that the church should be doing to serve our neighbours, our need to give of time, talent, and money would be absolutely undiminished.

Let me say in closing there is a package for each of us to pick up today. In it is a two-part pledge form. The first part asks to what with our time and talent will we commit for 2025. The second part asks what our financial commitment will be. Both parts are of equal importance. We are asked to prayerfully consider each part of the form and respond as God call us. We are asked to have them back by Sunday, November 24th. They will be offered and blessed upon the altar on that day, The Feast of the Reign of Christ. The Reign of Christ is the Church’s equivalent of New Year’s Eve for when we gather on the following Sunday we will be on the first Sunday of Advent awaiting the birth of the Christ child and so the church’s cycle begins again as it has for lo these more than 2000 years.

On the financial side, the confidential forms will go to the Treasurer who will tally up what the parish can expect to receive. The total will be provided to the wardens and parish council in order to craft a budget for the next year and, therefore, a plan of how the parish will operate in 2025.

If that total reflects the sincere commitment that we feel called to make, that total may or may not allow this parish to be what it has

HOMILY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

been or what we would like it to be, but it will be who God is calling us to be in the year to come because it is founded on a gathered community of believers who have taken their spiritual health seriously.

Thanks be to God,

Amen