

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday

November 16, 2008

It is the end of the church year and the Sunday readings turn dark and somber in tone. Today's Gospel reminds us that we will be held accountable for the use of the gifts we have received. Strange, isn't it, that many of us don't even recognize our own gifts. I have no gifts, we say to ourselves, and by that we mean that we have no extraordinary gifts. We have not been stars on stage or screen. We have not been leaders in science. We have not been financial wizards. We have not been senators or presidents. But what are all those so-called extraordinary gifts without the one most extraordinary gift, the gift which is extraordinary not because it is rare--though it is rare in its full blossom--but because it is the gift which makes us human beings human, makes us ourselves, makes us what we are supposed to be in the eyes of God and, ultimately, in the eyes of others. And that is, as you know well, the gift of love. So, as we approach the end of the church year and, for many of us, the ends of our lives, let us look more carefully at this most extraordinary gift and try to make it blossom more fully in our lives. And remember how Paul describes it in ch. 13 of his First Letter to the Corinthians. We could concentrate on one characteristic at a time, or we could focus on the characteristic which we think is weakest in our lives.

But let that suffice for a sermon for today, because now I wish to give you the annual parish financial report.

This past fiscal year our total income was \$247,000, while our total expenses were \$275,000. So we are running \$28,000 in the red. That is the bottom line. If you wish to know more details, please let me know and I will provide you with a detailed budget statement. To remove that deficit, we would have to do a number of things. One would be to increase parish membership, especially with younger families who have children, but given our location that seems difficult to do. However, if you know of people who are looking for a parish and who would be at home here at St. Charles, please invite them to come. Another would be to cut expenses. We welcome your suggestions for doing that. A third would be to ask you, the present members of the parish, to increase your financial support. Even though that may be something very difficult to do in the present economy, let me ask you to consider it.

Here are some norms you can use in considering this request. Traditionally, Christians—and perhaps Protestants more than Catholics—have tithed. To tithe is to give one tenth of one's income (either before or after taxes) to charity. Now let us suppose that you give to many different charities and therefore decide to give one half of that tithing, that is, five percent of your

income, to your parish. What would that turn out to be? You will soon receive by mail a break-down of what this amount would be. Please examine it in order to decide what your weekly and/or yearly offering should be. For example, if your income is \$20,000 a year and you give 5% of it to the parish, your weekly gift to the parish will be \$19.00 each week or \$988.00 for the year. If you think that is too much and decide to give not 5% but 2.5% of your income, your weekly gift will be \$10.00 and your yearly gift \$520.

Good intentions are more likely to survive if a commitment to keep them is involved. Therefore, we are asking you to commit yourselves to give a specified amount to our parish for the coming year. Such a commitment will accomplish two goals: it will strengthen your resolve and it will help the parish to plan its budget. Clearly, what you promise will be known only to those who have to know it to keep our and your financial records in order. Without this additional income the future of our parish is in danger. That is why your pledge of 5% or at least 2.5% is so important, so necessary. Within a week or two you will receive a card in the mail asking you to fill out your pledge for the coming year. Please do not ignore it. Our parish's future depends on your response.

Let me conclude by thanking all of you for what you do for St. Charles. Our St. Vincent de Paul Society, here called Bryan's Pantry, is now the ninth largest food pantry in the state. On one recent Thursday we served over two hundred people. Thanks to all of you who are here every Wednesday and Thursday to shelve and then give out the food. The diocese also uses our basement to provide people with aid for fuel, clothing and rent. Thank to those who work on the bazaar each year, and to our cooks who produce many delicious dinners during the course of the year. Thanks to those who are on the liturgy committee. Our lectors, servers, Eucharistic ministers and musicians are faithful and talented and make our liturgies prayerful and beautiful. Thanks to you who teach our youngsters their catechism. This is a work of great importance. Thanks to our Building and Grounds Committee members, to our Five-Year Planning Committee, and to the members of our Parish Council. These are just some of the people who make our parish such a wonderful place. May the Lord bless you all for your labors!

(Rev) Gerald F. Finnegan, SJ

Pastor

