

33rd Sunday. 07

1. On the television this past week there was a program about a controversy which took place a few years ago in the town of Dover, PA. Some members of the school board there insisted that in science classes Darwin's theory of evolution should not be presented as the only scientific theory of how we came to be. They wanted another theory called intelligent design to be made available to the students. They were taken to court by teachers from the science department of the school and the verdict went against them because it was discovered that this theory of intelligent design was simply the religious belief of creationism under a different name and did not qualify as a scientific theory. Those defending this position were members of a fundamentalist Christian church who take the bible literally. Thus they believe that God created the world in seven days, and the world itself is four to six thousand years old. For them science and religion don't say the same thing, and they choose to follow religion rather than science.

2. For us Catholics there is no such choice. True science cannot contradict true religion. If the two are in conflict, it is because one or the other is not correct or because we are not correct in understanding one or both of them. The reason we hold this position is because we believe that there is only one God who has revealed himself in his creation and in Jesus of Nazareth, and he cannot contradict himself in this twofold revelation.

3. And this position explains why we Catholics are not likely to be found among the number of those who read "the signs of the times" and then began to prophesy that the end of history is just around the corner. Yes, we believe in a last day. Yes, we know that there are wars and natural disasters, but we don't believe that we can or should take the presence of these negative realities as sure signs that the end is near. No, we leave it to God alone to decide when that will happen, and when it does happen, we know that

there will be no mistaking it. It will be as obvious as “lightning flashing and lighting up the sky from one side to the other” (Lk 17:24).

4. But how are we to behave in the meantime? Today’s readings tell us how to do so. The last sentence of today’s Gospel tells us: “By your perseverance you will secure your lives” (Lk 27:19). And in our second reading today from 2 Thessalonians Paul tells his converts that they should live as he lived when he was among them. He worked quietly, earning his own bread so that he would not be a burden to them. But his example was not being followed by some members of the community. Perhaps they felt that the end day was coming soon and they should no longer be bothered with working for a long-time future which would never come to be. So they had given up working and were idle and then had begun to gossip and interfere in other people’s business. Paul wants to correct this kind of behavior. His instruction to them is: Work quietly and earn your own food.

5. Just this week a man came to me asking me if I could help him find work. What a terrible thing it is when people who want to work cannot find it. Following Paul, our church teaches us that we should work. But it also teaches that where there is an obligation there is also a right. That is, if people have an obligation to work, they also have a right to work. Therefore, we should all do whatever we can to create a society in which work is available. A nation which does not do that is unjust, and eventually the people will turn to violence to find work and food.

6. But what about those of us who are older and can no longer work? For many of us this is a difficult situation, and not only because we can no longer see ourselves as productive members of society, but also because our income may be drastically reduced. Many sisters are now in that situation. They worked for years in

our schools for nothing and now have practically nothing? We as a church have to help them.

7. What about those among us who have enough for retirement and are still healthy? How should we live? Should it be simply Florida and golf? Maybe some of us feel that we have earned these years of leisure and enjoyment. But don't we need some kind of "work" in order to give our lives purpose? Could not these golden years be the years when we pursue what is really worthwhile: the development of ourselves as people (back to school?) and the caring for our neighborhood and world so that our grandchildren will live in a more just world? Would that not be a living of the gospel and Paul's letter? We would be working quietly and not becoming busy-bodies. We would be persevering in good works and securing our lives, as Jesus tells us to do in today's Gospel.

8. At the end of the church year when the liturgy turns our thoughts to the last times, it might be good for all of us, but especially for those of us who are at the end of our lives, to evaluate the way we live. Are we living the gospel in the present stage of our lives?