

**THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B**

Nm 11:25-29; Os 19:8,10,12-13,14; Jas 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43,45,47-48

***THE REFRIGERATOR***

***YOUR HANDS IN OUR FUTURE: STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, September 29, 2018, 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, September 30, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

We have a refrigerator.

One of the school kids came up and told me,

“O, Fr. Mike, we’re going to have a really cool homily!”

Mr. Fox, our school principle, predicts: “It will be chilling!”

Did you hear about young Fr. Murphy who was called to the hospital?

A very old man was dying.

So Fr. Murphy leaned over the bed and announced,

“I am a priest, is there anything I can do for you?”

And the man mustered all his strength, and groaned,

“Yes, Father, stop sending the envelopes!”

Maybe you heard about the good Methodist minister.

The Reverend was very tolerant, open-minded, ecumenical.

So he put a note up on the church bulletin board,

“This church welcomes all denominations,  
tens and twenties, and especially fifties and hundreds.”

There was a Baptist minister in a very old church in the south.

The ceiling was in terrible shape.

The pastor gave an eloquent, persuasive sermon, pleading:

“We have to have your help to fix this church!”

Anyway, there was a man in the congregation.

The guy was loaded, but miserly, so tight that he squeaked.

The people in the community nick-named him “Money-bags,”  
and he gave virtually nothing to the church.

So the preacher finished his sermon, and “Money-bags” stood up:

“I give \$5 to the Lord to fix this church.”

Just that moment a large chunk of plaster fell out of the ceiling  
and plunked on the stingy-guy’s head.

Stunned, he stammered, “OK, Lord, f-f-five hundred dollars.”

And the minister was heard praying,

“Lord, hit ‘em again, hit ‘em again, harder, harder.”

So, today, we are going to delve into Christian stewardship.

To help us better understand this concept,

we have enlisted the help of a refrigerator.

It’s a nice refrigerator.

It’s not perfect:

it doesn’t have an ice-maker;

it doesn’t have a cold water dispenser in the door.

But it has a large capacity,

a nice crisper on the bottom,

it runs quietly, it is energy efficient.

This refrigerator represents a person's or family's income:  
the money earned during the year,  
and priorities for how that money gets spent.

There are some really important parts of the budget,  
ways that we have to spend our money,  
stuff that is really not optional.

Even before we get our paycheck,  
taxes come out first,  
15 or 20 or 25 percent one's income is taxes: federal taxes, state taxes.  
Uncle Sam gets the first cut (U. S. flag).  
God bless America!

Then there are the necessary things to keep us alive:  
housing, food, clothing, medical care.  
And this stuff runs into a lot of money.

So we have the house (little toy house)  
and the furnishings (play chairs, play couch).  
Most of us try to have a pretty nice house, nice stuff inside.  
It is not unusual for a house payment to be \$1000+ a month,  
\$12,000 or more for the year.

Then, food: we're not going to go without eating.  
Family of four, easy to spend over \$100 a week on groceries;  
roundly \$500 a month, \$6000 a year.

Clothes - everyone here has clothes on, looks pretty important.  
Medical care, health insurance (our stethoscope)  
which runs into the thousands a year - can't go without that.

Our money, "easy come, easy go."

Let's look at the lower level of the refrigerator.  
We spend our money on other stuff too.  
This isn't everything,  
but at least it gives us a general picture.

Transportation, top shelf.  
Vehicles. We like our cars and trucks.  
One-car garages are getting less common.  
Car, pick-up truck, SUV, whatever.  
(Car payments, car insurance,  
gas, car repairs - it runs into thousands).

Inside the house,  
the telephone, cell phone, with a monthly bill;  
TV (usually more than one TV), and cable, monthly bill.

Have to have some fun.  
Boat (sorry, no motorcycle, jet ski, or snowmobile).  
We have an airplane, have to go on vacation.

This goes on and on and on,  
and by the time we're done paying for all this stuff,  
we're really stretched, we can barely make ends meet.

But wait, down in the crisper we have something else.  
Look here, Tupperware, Rubbermaid, left overs.  
Look here, a paper plate, left overs.  
Let's look.

There's a little money: a few ones, some change -  
a stewardship envelop, it's for the Church - leftovers.  
For many folks, when all of the other stuff is paid for,  
a small part of whatever is left goes for God's purposes,  
"off the bottom," (sometimes begrudgingly).

So we place our offering, left overs, before the altar.

Let's go to the other side of the sanctuary.  
God has a different model for us,  
given to us by Moses, the great teacher of the Old Testament.  
The model is called FIRST FRUITS.

The ancient world of Israel was different from ours.  
It was a land-based, agrarian economy.  
Many of the staples of their agricultural economy are right here.  
Let's take a look.

Grain: barley, wheat, and after milling, bread.  
Grapes, raw form, and the processed form, wine.  
Olives, olive trees cover the hillsides in Israel,  
after the presses, crushed into oil, gathered in huge jars,  
olive oil, for cooking, for lamps, medicinally on dry skin.  
We left out the animals:  
cattle, goats, sheep,  
milk, beef, mutton, and wool (all missing here).

According to Moses' teaching,  
all of this is SACRED, HOLY.  
God provides the land.  
God makes the plants grow.  
God gives the abundant harvest.  
It testifies to the incredible power of God (refrigerator too!).  
It is God's doing, not ours.

So Moses taught the people,  
"We must make a return to the Lord  
on all we have received from God" (Dt 26:1-11).  
God wants our first fruits.

When the harvest started to come in,  
the first shock of wheat, the first bushel of wheat,  
was taken to the Temple and placed before the altar,  
before collecting any grain for one's self or one's family.  
Barley harvest, early spring (first fruits of Passover).  
Wheat harvest, late spring (first fruits of Pentecost).  
After processing the grain, grinding, flour,  
after baking the first loaf of bread, it goes to the Temple.

And so it is with all of this:  
first grapes, to the Temple,  
first skin of wine, to the Temple,  
first olives,  
first jar of olive oil,  
first figs, dates.  
All, placed before the altar, “off the top,” first,  
and the person (family) got to keep the rest.

This might make you and me a little nervous,  
“What if I give my first fruits to God  
and don’t have enough for myself?”  
This is a modern, materialistic question.  
It was a non-question to ancient believers.  
They weren’t infected with our culture.

When a faith-filled Jew offered FIRST FRUITS,  
it meant a number of things:  
\* God made everything, and everything belongs to God;  
\* FIRST FRUITS are holy, all fruits are holy;  
\* thank you for my blessings;  
\* I trust that you, God, will continue to provide;  
\* please, bless and take care of my family; and  
\* I support the spiritual mission of the Temple.  
It was a tremendous act of FAITH to offer FIRST FRUITS.

We must apply this for ourselves.  
We are no longer in an agrarian society.  
We don’t trade in commodities, agricultural products,  
we trade with money.  
Their rewards came at harvest time.  
Our rewards come on pay day.  
They offered the FIRST FRUITS of the harvest (“off the top”).  
If we apply this to today, as we must,  
we are called to offer FIRST FRUITS,  
not of the harvest, but of the pay check.

To a Jew who was obeying the Law of Moses,  
it would be unthinkable to give God “left overs.”  
God is too important.  
God always gets FIRST FRUITS.  
Then the person gets to keep everything else.

My friends,  
“refrigerator thinking,”  
“left-over thinking” is very prevalent.  
Moses is offering us a faith-based biblical alternative.  
FIRST FRUITS applies to everything:  
our time, our talent, and our treasure.

When we share “left overs,” “off the bottom,”  
out of the crisper of the refrigerator,  
reluctantly, sometimes begrudgingly,  
it’s often out of fear, sometimes out of selfishness,  
it’s not a very rewarding experience.

But when we share FIRST FRUITS,  
gladly, generously,  
“off the top,”  
it is amazing how God rewards us with  
peace and happiness, joy and satisfaction.

The feeling is so great when we know,  
deep in our hearts,  
that God comes first,  
and that we are doing what God wants.

My friends,  
we are more richly blessed than any generation that has ever lived.  
Best standard of living:  
more money, nicer homes, best food, best health care.  
Hopefully we won't need a chunk of plaster to fall out of the ceiling  
and crash onto our heads to make us wake up.  
God has given us everything.  
All belongs to God.  
God invites you and me to make an act of faith,  
to offer our FIRST FRUITS,  
to support the Kingdom of God on earth,  
to keep God always first.