

HOMILY - SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2008
4th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Introduction

It happens so often that the regular cycle of scriptural readings during the liturgical year lends itself to current events. Sometimes the connection is almost uncanny, as for example today's readings of this Super Bowl Sunday.

We just heard the Beatitudes, Jesus' blueprint for those of us to strive to walk in his footsteps. And the reading prior to that Gospel has St. Paul insisting that God chooses the weak, those considered foolish by the sophisticated, the lowly and despised to confound the privileged and powerful of the world. The first reading, too, from old Zephaniah the Prophet came from a person who was raised up to counteract the idolatry into which the People of God in his time had fallen. I believe these passages from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures hold up a mirror to our culture, and no more so than on this secular holiday we call Super Bowl Sunday.

I

Compare if you would the terms of Jesus' Beatitudes poverty of spirit meekness the search for justice mercy peacemaking integrity and purity of heart compare those values with the following statistics:

- 90 million people will watch this Super Bowl and spend an estimated \$10 Billion on new TV sets, food, alcohol and parties.
- Las Vegas expects to make \$100 million from wagers on the game
- 4786 press credentials have been awarded - for a game
- ticket prices reach \$6325 for one seat in the stadium
- a motel room for one night at the Hampden Inn near Phoenix costs \$799.

And all of this for a spectacle which includes "bombs", sacks, attacks, carried out by a group of grossly overweight men running up and down a field giving each other concussions, just so that a few people in this country can say "We're Number One".

II

The Super Bowl in turn is a mirror of our disastrous adventurism in Iraq, where according to a recent report from the Congressional Budget Office we have spent to date over \$1 Trillion - that is, \$20 Million per day since it all began five years ago, or \$1 Million every two minutes of that period. By way of exclamation point to this incredible excess the proposed military budget for the next fiscal year has climbed to \$550 Billion - not counting the war against terrorism, including in Iraq.

III

The good news is that by 10:00 or 10:30 this evening the Super Bowl will be over: all the excess, the over-the-top spending, and the excitement. One team will have scored more points than the other and life will go on. Even better news is that in three days Lent will begin for us who have really heard today's reading. We shall have the God-given opportunity to ask pardon of the Almighty for the idolatry of our society - around a football game and around the world.

Conclusion

Let me suggest by way of conclusion that Lent in the context of our American culture is much like another Scriptural passage - Genesis, Chapter 18. God is about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah for their corporate sins. But the patriarch Abraham, father of the great monotheistic religions, intercedes with God, saying "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people there..." (Gen. 18:23-24) God agrees to spare the cities for the fifty innocent. And if there are 45, Abraham continues. Again God agrees to spare the cities. And if there are 40? God agrees. 30? 20? - again, yes. And what if there are only ten innocent persons there? "For the sake of the 10", God says, "I will not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah". (Gen. 18:32) I believe that you, that we, and so many good people in this country are the 50, the 45, the 40, 30, 20 and 10. Lent, I submit to you, is our time to save the very soul of America.