

Homily for Sunday, October 26, 2007

## Introduction

With apologies to my old professor of homiletics, the man who gave us our introduction into the ministry of preaching, I'm going to break one of his cardinal rules this morning. He always told us just to make one point in a Sunday homily; let the second or third points wait for another time. Not bad advice, but today I'm going to make two points - briefly.

### I

The best way to address the first point is with a story. Some years ago a group of us, many of whom had lived and served in poor countries and came back to the U.S with some fire in our stomachs, managed to get a top level interview at the International Monetary Fund. We presented our case to these quite sophisticated people from that lending institution that their policies were in many cases not at all helpful to the poorest people in countries where we had worked.

The Managing Director of the IMF responded to us with a very formal, prepared statement, in which he kind of talked down to us, patronizing us and telling us that we really should learn a bit more about economics, about the "stern laws of the market" in his words.

When we had the opportunity to reply to this gentleman's lecture, one of our number - it wasn't I - admitted that there were indeed "stern laws of the market", but there were also "stern laws of the prophets", laws which illustrated the fact that societies and organizations like the International Monetary Fund will be judged ultimately on how they treat the poorest people of a given country.

### II

Today we have heard in our first reading some of these "stern laws of the prophets". God speaks to the people in quite strong, even harsh language about justice for those who lack justice. This is what we call Old Testament language, in this case from the Hebrew Book of Exodus.

The Lord speaks about oppressing the alien  
    wronging the widow and the orphan  
    lending money at exorbitant interest rates to a poor neighbor  
    holding someone's property as collateral

### III

These categories are immediately and directly applicable to current realities as we come up on a national election;

we have to figure out what to do about our immigrant brothers and sisters who come here just to work and help their families

we are bailing out banks at the expense of the poor

there are exorbitant interest rates being charged to many who simply cannot pay them

foreclosures on people's homes are becoming all too common

And the tragedy is that in our current national debate these issues never appear - no one is speaking of the poor in our country, let alone around the world; no one is raising the issue of the elderly living on fixed incomes who are seeing their savings erode in the current economic crisis; no one is talking in favor of the handicapped or mentally ill.

#### IV

The second point today is different but related. In the Gospel we just heard Jesus speaks of love for neighbor as similar to love for God. I believe that love for our neighbor has to include concern for our environment, our home, Mother Earth. The issue of care for creation is one of the seven themes which our U.S. Catholic Bishops have presented as important to consider in our decisions about political leaders.

St. Francis of Assisi (and you will forgive this free advertisement for the founder of my Franciscan Order) wrote a lovely poem toward the end of his life entitled "The Canticle of the Sun". He spoke of the sun as "brother", the earth as "mother", water as "sister". This was an amazing insight for a 13th Century person - that we are brothers and sisters to the web of life and creation which surrounds us.

This consideration of our environment in choosing public leaders - discerning which of the candidates will prove most friendly to our endangered planet - is most important and the bishops are so right in raising it.

#### Conclusion

The issues of the poor, the alien, the needy and the current dangers to our lovely habitat need to be spoken to. As the saying goes in this regard and in the face of the public silence about them: if not us, who; if not now, when; if not here, where. May this be our prayer in this final week before elections: that however God gives us to do it, in whatever circle we move we will speak our truth on these life issues.