

Homily for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Once upon a time there was a woman married to a most annoying man. He would complain about everything. He never helped out. He expected to be taken care of all the time.

One day he went to the creek with his mule. He complained so much that the mule got annoyed and kicked him to death. At the funeral, when all the men walked by the wife she shook her head “yes.” Every time the women walked by she shook her head “no.”

The priest asked the woman: “Why are you shaking your head “yes” for men and “no” for women?” Her response was: “The men would say how sorry they felt for me and I was saying, ‘Yes, I’ll be alright.’ When the women walked by, they were asking if the mule was for sale...”

The readings today seem filled with gloom and doom. The prophet Daniel tells of the day when the great Archangel, Michael, shall trumpet the end of time. And Jesus speaks of the time when the Son of Man shall come in glory and gather the elect into His kingdom.

While some might find these readings frightening, they would be wrong. For the readings are given to us not to incite fear but rather to invite reflection about how we live our lives today.

The imaginary mule-kicked husband certainly represents people who spend their lives locked in themselves and whose only concern is that the world bow down to their needs. And while the husband may be an extreme example, the many variations of his behavior find a home in many places and peoples in our world.

The readings challenge us to look at life differently...not with self-centered concern but with compassion and care. It calls us to see with new eyes. To see that the person who cuts us off in traffic might be a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children. Perhaps the elderly couple who are walking annoyingly slowly through the store aisles and who block our shopping progress are savoring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this might be the last time that they will be able to go shopping together for a while.

To serve each other is not only to learn to think differently it also means taking the next step and moving outside of ourselves: to lend a hand to those in need, a listening ear to those who are lonely and a compassionate and understanding heart to those who find themselves living on the fringes of society.

It is only when we learn to give ourselves in service to each other and to those in need that we gain a proper perspective on life and let Jesus Christ lead us so that we might, in the words of the prophet Daniel, “be wise and shine brightly...like the stars forever.”