

Homily for 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Many, many years ago....24 to be precise...it was the custom of the surrounding parishes to assist St. Joseph's in West Warwick for their Sunday evening Mass. It was a time when the religious community who had staffed the parish had left and was replaced by a single priest. This "helping out" was a way to assist the priest in dealing with what seemed to be a schedule better suited for three priests rather than one.

And so it was that on a Sunday evening in early November I went over to St. Joseph's to celebrate Mass. As usual, I arrived early, set up for Mass and then walked outside for a quick cigarette (thankfully I gave up smoking some 4 months later.)

So here I was walking around the parking lot that was very dark when suddenly a car entered the parking area at a rather high speed. Seeing me he smashed down on the brakes and barely missed me by a quarter of an inch. Angry and upset he rolled down his window and began venting his anger and screaming a list of obscenities at me. I had no chance to say anything when he sped away to the end of the lot where he parked his car and then got out and went inside for Mass.

Imagine his shock when I walked out to celebrate Mass. He was sitting in the first three rows and it was rather obvious that he was

embarrassed beyond words that he had spoken to me in such a harsh tone. At the end of Mass he apologized to me over and over again, assuring me that he was wrong and begged my forgiveness.

I was very touched by his willingness to fess up to his tirade of harsh words. But here's what really bothered me. He did it because I was a priest and not because I was a human being...sort of like doing the right thing for the wrong reason. He should have been remorseful because he had treated another person with a lack of respect and with a large dose of anger.

I thought of that real-life experience when I reflected on the readings for this weekend. The command of Moses to "be holy" for the Lord our God is holy was a wonderful prelude to St. Paul in the second reading and Jesus in the Gospel.

St. Paul reminds us that we should be hold because each one of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit That Holy Spirit calls us to act appropriately. Jesus in the gospel presents us a stinging reminder that we are called to treat each other with love and not with revenge. Jesus tells us that it is insufficient to simply love those who love you. What we must be "holy" is to be like God who loves without reserve and without judgment.

The world we live in is rich in vengeance and quick-temper. The world we live in often forgets that each of us is a temple of God's

love. The world forgets that we are called not to judge, rebuke or take vengeance on each other. Rather we are called to love each other for no other reason than each of us is created by God in love and are to be treasured always and everywhere for the gift that we are.