October 30, 2016
Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time –
“Never give up, never give up, never, never, never, never give up our focus on God.”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1  Wisdom 11:22-12:2
Before the LORD the whole universe is as a grain from a balance or a drop of morning dew come down upon the earth. But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook people's sins that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable spirit is in all things! Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!

Responsorial Psalm  Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14
R. (cf. 1) I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God.
I will extol you, O my God and King, and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever. R.
The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works. R.
Let all your works give you thanks, O LORD, and let your faithful ones bless you. Let them discourse of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might. R.
The LORD is faithful in all his words and holy in all his works. The LORD lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. R.

Reading 2  2 Thes 1:11-2:2
Brothers and sisters: We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. We ask you, brothers and sisters, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling with him, not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a “spirit,” or by an oral statement, or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand.

At that time, Jesus came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town. Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.” But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.”
HOMILY

Seventy-five years ago … seventy-five years ago yesterday, in fact, a large part of Europe was in the early stages of World War 2, and Winston Churchill gave a speech with an excerpt quoted in many ways and by many people. He said, “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never— in nothing, great or small, large or petty— never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

My wife and I were reminded of that quote recently at a dinner, sponsored by a group of individuals who believe in the God-given principle that life is sacred from the moment of conception through natural termination in death. It’s an ecumenical group that unites the area’s life-affirming organizations in recognizing what others do. After dinner, a Protestant pastor gave a keynote speech about the importance of the group but how it was, unfortunately, disbanding … but HOLD ON, he said, the great idea behind the group of recognizing those who speak up for the respect of ALL human life will be carried on by another local Christian organization, giving it additional visibility and importance. He then gave a rendition of Sir Churchill’s quote, “Never give up, never give up, never, never, never, never give up. You can change your approach, you can change your path, but never give up.” On this God-given principle of believing that all human life is sacred at every moment of life, we should never give up. The Church believes in this so strongly, that October is celebrated as Respect Life Month.

But sometimes, it’s easy to feel like giving in, and giving up … isn’t it. Election Day is a little over a week away, and many are divided and angry. And many think that our religious values are under attack from almost every new law or policy. We have become very confused as to what we Catholic Christians believe is right and what is wrong. And if we’re confused, think what that is doing to the youngsters. Many feel that the country, if not the world, is losing its focus … its’ moral compass … its’ soul. Many feel that this is happening because, in today’s society, people are being encouraged to put their own wants and needs far ahead that of others, and far less on God and seeing God in others. But, consider that:

❖ People who keep their focus on God tend to be happier, more supportive of others, less confused, and less me, myself and I.
❖ People who keep their focus on God often know where to look for direction in the life issues, and their dilemmas – the Catechism, the Bible, the confessional.
❖ People who keep their focus on God tend to be a people of Love, a people of Hope, a people of Faith.

So, I’d like to suggest that we try to increase our focus on God … on God’s Will … on God’s principles and teachings … and on seeing God in others. I’d like to suggest that we never give up, never give up, never, never, never, never give up our focus on God throughout life …

Well, you may be thinking, that’s easy to say, Deacon Dave, but our society has confused morality and the meaning of words so much, how do we do THAT? Well, our readings today give some clear examples. In our Gospel passage, Zacchaeus was an important figure – he was not just a tax collector, but a chief tax collector, in Jericho, a city on a popular and well-traveled trade route, undoubtedly giving him opportunity to become very wealthy. Now, anybody below 6 feet tall is short to me, so I can’t tell you how tall he might have been, but he wanted to see Jesus, and he was too short to see...
through the crowd. Did you ever have an opportunity to see someone who seemed really important to you – maybe a musical group or singer, maybe a relative you hadn’t seen in many years – do you remember the excitement, the rush you felt in the moments leading up to that encounter? Zacchaeus wanted to see this person, Jesus, who was teaching about God, this person who was healing the sick, driving out demons, and even raising some from death’s doors, this person who gave hope, who gave love, and who gave faith to all, even the outcasts of society. His focus was on Jesus, so much so that he did things completely unexpected for a person of his importance: he ran ahead – important people don’t run ahead of others, and then he climbed a tree – he probably had a long robe on, one appropriate for his position in the community. So, what a spectacle that must have been! And all this to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed under the tree – he kept his focus on trying to see Jesus, by changing his approach, and he didn’t give up. And, he was rewarded – Jesus stayed with him, and offered him salvation. We can learn from Zacchaeus: never give up, never give up, never, never, never, never give up our focus on God …

From today’s Responsorial Psalm, “I will praise you, O my God and King, and I will bless your name forever and ever. Every day will I bless you.” Now, THAT’S keeping focus on God! Why? Because, the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness … the Lord lifts up all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. … In our second reading, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians, “We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling …” Praying to God – keeping God in our focus. Even Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father. And in our first reading, the Wisdom author notes that God does want us to give up something – sin, “Therefore you rebuke offenders little by little, warn them and remind them of the sins they are committing, that they may abandon their wickedness and believe in you, O LORD!” We can learn from these readings: never give up, never give up, never, never, never, never give up our focus on God …

Keeping our focus on God and others, and less on ourselves. And if an obstacle gets in the way, try to find a workaround. Remember the acronym PEAS … even if you don’t like to eat them. PEAS – prayer, education, action, service. P-prayer. Never, never, never give up praying. We can certainly pray for a just and speedy resolution to our own issues and dilemmas, but we also need to see the face of Jesus in all others, and to pray for them, and their issues. That may be much easier for someone we love, but pray also for those in prisons, pregnancy centers, in the homeless centers or on the streets, in the nursing homes, the lonely, the depressed, the addicted. And pray for peace throughout the world, between nations, on the streets and in our hearts. Pray for those elected next week to support the sanctity of life from conception until natural death – all life, including those just mentioned, but especially the unborn, and their mothers and fathers. Pray throughout the day, even a simple prayer. Join others in praying before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament here on Thursday evenings, or in solitude, anytime 24/7 at St. Louis’ Perpetual Adoration over at St. John’s chapel. E-education. Never, never, never stop learning about God and your faith. Read the Bible daily, pick a topic and read about it in the Catechism. Join ChristLife. Listen to the Lighthouse CD’s that are in the Narthex. Join a Bible Study group, teach or assist at Faith Formation classes, or RCIA. Did you ever hear that the best way to learn more about something is to help teach it? A-action. Never, never, never stop activity to promote God and your faith. Get involved! Vote next week – for elections at local, state and national levels – remember those who
most support the sanctity of all life. Spread your faith to others, especially your family members, by your actions and your words. Invite a neighbor or co-worker to Mass with you some day. **Service.** Never, never, never stop seeing the face of Jesus in others. There are just a few weeks left to this wonderful Year of Mercy, so I encourage each of you to check out the Works of Mercy board in the back of church, with both Corporal and Spiritual Works that you can do for others. Serving others will help us keep our focus on God and God’s creation.

Never, never, never, never give up our focus on God, and all that God has done for us. God doesn’t give up on us. We are reminded of God’s love for us in this Year of Mercy. Let’s join together in our thanksgiving, our celebration of the Eucharist, as we keep our focus on God.