November 13 Homily

You probably know by now, I am most at home preaching on the scriptures. Next would be preaching on the sacraments, and preaching on community, or family, especially community as family. However I struggle when it comes to preaching about political issues, and speaking about money is even more of a stretch for me. So here I am today, realizing I need to preach about politics, religion and money, all in one short homily. By all means, pray for me!

Politics. It was a painful election season. The focus on issues was often lost. Disagreement became invective. Trust was eroded in so many ways. Deep divisions were opened up. Polarization and anger were everywhere. The election often seemed to bring out the worst in people, and sadly that is still true, post-election. Add in real fears some folks now have. The need for healing is great. We need to remember: healing, reconciliation, focus on the common good --- that’s who we are as Christians, it is the mission of the church.

But where to start? I was going to speak about sin, and about grace. Malachi, St. Paul, St. Luke: They all lived in a world where sin and grace both abounded, all too often interwoven. That is because every single person, whether an author of scripture, a preacher, a person in the pew, or even a politician: every single one of us is a sinner. Yet we are all also capable of grace. Our life’s mission is to discover the sin and turn away from it, and turn more and more into the life of loving, the life of grace.

I considered covering the seven deadly sins and then the contrary virtues, virtues that counter the sins. But our time is too short. Perhaps just cover the root: St. Thomas Aquinas’ insight that the root of all sin is inordinate self-love; pride – something we can all struggle with at times. Inordinate, because tempted by pride, we take credit for who we are, forgetting we are nothing and have nothing that God didn’t freely give us. Inordinate too because, when exaggerating our superiority, the only way to attain the heights is to put everyone else below us. Not good.

Those things deserve attention, but I decided what is needed right now is a word of hope.

No spouse enters a marriage ready to be everything God wants them to be for their partner. Marriage is intended to help both partners move away from sin and into grace. It doesn’t always happen, but I see the fruit of that grace in this parish every single day. It is an inspiration to me!

When a couple’s first child is born into the world, they are never already to be everything their child will need, the perfect parent. But parenting helps them grow up into a good parent. Children humbling their parents may not be fun, but it is a grace and gift of God, a cure for pride.

Let’s include priests. It is vocation awareness week. Priests have to deal with post ordination pride just as the couple getting married that think they have it all together. If I am not badly mistaken, right after I was ordained I was pretty convinced I knew quite a bit more than the pastor. Mercifully the congregation helped me discover otherwise.

Marriage changes couples. Having a child turns the couple into parents. Ministry changes clergy.

The weight of any office, and certainly the weight of the office of president has reliably changed presidents, starting with George Washington, and every single one of his successors.

No matter who is elected for what office, it is the weight of responsibility that turns the campaigner into a public servant. No matter who was elected, that would be true.
Let me add a word about campaign promises. A common cynical attitude is that politicians never keep promises. That can be a good thing. What may have seemed a simple solution, based on half the facts, and without responsibility for the consequences, can look very different when everyone is looking to you to be a good leader.

Our task is to keep our focus on the values the Lord calls us to. To pray that with the courage that comes from God, we can proclaim those values, live them, and help others to see the merit of Christian values and basic non-negotiables. Values we have always had to fight for, and will always need to hold up. The sacredness of human life. The dignity of every human person, made in God’s image. Care for hungry, the homeless, the poor, the widow and the orphan. Care for the planet God entrusted to us. Justice for all people. Working together for the common good.

Learning to respect, listen to, and learn from those who are different from us, whose experience has led them to see the world and issues differently. You don’t need to travel to find the differences. They are right here in the congregation, often right in our individual families. So we are called to do our best to be humble enough to realize just how much we need each other, because none of us have all the right answers.

OK, that’s politics and religion, now to money.

As I mentioned last week, and we heard from some of our key volunteers, this month we are asking everyone to take a good look at stewardship. I see this as an incredible generous parish, so generous with time, talent and treasure. But as those who have had the longest time to develop good stewardship are called home, we all need to take a step forward, with some moving into those positions of leadership, ministry and generosity of various kinds.

In the bulletin you will find the State of the Parish report. You will see a snapshot of all that happens in the course of a year, how many lives are touched by ministry here. Hopefully ideas will surface like “I could do that”. The figures to notice in the financial report: our income this past year was less than the previous year. It was also less than we budgeted. When very generous givers are called home to God, it impacts the bottom line, both for parish income and for our CMA. Since growing in stewardship is growing as a disciple, we are inviting everyone to take a prayerful look at their stewardship of time, talent and treasure.

Now please know: I do NOT want this to be stressful for anyone. For some, the demands at home have increased, and you need to be using your time and talent there. Please don’t feel guilty that you can’t do more here! For some, your financial circumstances have changed, and it is impossible to increase your contributions. But many of us could stretch a bit, and would actually be blessed as a result. I have tremendous confidence in your good judgement.

Restoring unity in the country will require some amazing stretching. By comparison, this campaign is inviting us to much more modest stretching. May God bless us in both, bringing healing to our nation, and growth and blessing to our families and our parish family. Fr. Bob