

Father O'Connor's Homily for 14 November 2021
Thirty-third Ordinary Sunday – B

Daniel 12:1-3
Hebrews 10: 11-14, 18
Mark 13: 24-32

Next weekend is Commitment Sunday in our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes for our diocesan “Heart of a Shepherd Campaign.” I hope that you have been able to review the campaign information that has been mailed and the campaign videos on our parish website.

The purposes of the campaign are: 1) to support our two diocesan seminaries and our seminarians [who will be our future priests to staff our parishes one day]; 2) to help our newly-ordained priests who are saddled with student loans; 3) to assist our retired priests by fully-funding our Priest Pension Fund; 4) and to take care of our own parishes with 65 cents of every dollar raised returning to the contributor's parish. Your contributions will help pay for your church's new roof.

Our pledges are payable over three years. Our parish goals are based upon 50% of the Sunday Offertory income during the calendar year 2020.

The goal for Nativity Parish is \$64,987, and so far \$10,600 has already been raised [16.3% of the goal].

The goal for Saint Joseph Parish is \$403,327, and so far \$354,500 has already been raised [87.8% of the goal]. And 80 cents of every dollar raised over the goal returns to the parish.

If you have already made your pledge to this “Heart of a Shepherd Campaign,” I thank you. If you have not yet made a pledge, I encourage you to pray about it this week and come prepared next weekend with your decision.

I thank you all from my heart for your goodness and generosity.

A cartoon shows a man dressed as a prophet and holding a sign which reads: “Resist temptation.” In the next frame is a rather scruffy-looking fellow who says to the prophet: “I’m not looking to resist temptation. I’m looking to find it!”

This cartoon tells us something about our human nature. We know that we need to resist temptation. But sometimes we resist God's grace and

actually go looking for temptation. And then we feel guilty after we have fallen for it and sinned.

So what do we make of our guilt?

The Letter to the Hebrews tells us today that Jesus “offered one sacrifice for sins and took His seat forever at the right hand of God.”

There are people who suffer from overwhelming guilt. Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, “The Tell-Tale Heart” [published in 1843], deals with a man with a guilty conscience. He had murdered an old man with a “vulture eye.” He then hid his body under the floorboards. Ultimately his guilt manifests itself in the hallucination that the murdered man’s heart is still beating under the floorboards. The beating of that heart gets louder and louder until the guilty man is finally compelled to reveal his crime.

There are people who suffer from guilt in extreme ways and without any proportion. My heart goes out to people who suffer from scrupulosity. While venial sin is sin indeed, the scrupulous person tends to see every sin, and all kinds of circumstances, as mortal sin. And they can become so obsessed with a kind of guilt that does not lead to a real conversion of life or a growth in virtue, but leads instead to a compulsive high anxiety. My heart goes out to those afflicted with this painful disorder of scrupulosity.

But for most of us, guilt can be a very healthy tool. As someone put it: “Guilt is for the soul what pain is for the body.” We do not go looking for pain, but when we have a physical pain it tells us that something is wrong and needs attention, so that we can feel better again.

Guilt can do that for our souls. It tells us that something is wrong and needs attention. It can lead us to God’s mercy and forgiveness, so that we can feel better.

A preacher was talking about the weight of sin. And someone in the congregation asked: “How much does sin weigh? Ten pounds?”

The preacher thought for a moment, and then replied: “If you put a two-hundred pound weight on a corpse, will that body feel anything?”

“Of course not,” the man answered, “because that body is dead.”

The preacher went on to say: “When our spirit is dead, we stop feeling the weight of our sin.”

That is an important observation because guilt, if properly felt, can lead us to God's mercy and forgiveness. But sometimes people would rather live "dead in their sins" – and no longer feel the weight of their sins.

Where can we go with our guilt? To Jesus Christ. As the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, Jesus "offered one sacrifice for sins, and took His seat forever at the right hand of God." We can go to Him because He is the only one who can forgive our sins. And His cross shows us how far He will go for us.

A novelist writes about a man on his deathbed. He is very sorry for his sins and begs Jesus for His mercy. The man closes his eyes and dies.

He is then standing before Jesus for judgment, and looking rather dirty and disheveled. Jesus smiles at him and takes a wet sponge and begins wiping the smudges off this man's face until he is clean.

And then Jesus says to him: "I know that your heart is truly sorry and I have forgiven your sins. Welcome to heaven, my dear one. Now, come and play in my kingdom."

Our guilt is a good thing if it leads us to Jesus who alone can forgive us.

He has given us the great Sacrament of His mercy – Confession, Penance, Reconciliation – in which He wipes away our sins and takes away our guilt. Jesus is always ready to forgive, and He simply waits for us to ask Him.

Meanwhile, we live day by day in hope that when our time for judgment comes, Jesus will say to us: "I know that your heart is truly sorry and I have forgiven your sins. Welcome to heaven, my dear one. Now, come and play in my kingdom."