

Homily092516

## A THOROUGHLY CATHOLIC QUESTION

Sometimes after a late Saturday afternoon wedding while standing outside with family and friends a question will arise. “Yo Father, did that Mass count?” Now that is a very Catholic question but a relatively new one in the history of our faith. It only arose once Saturday evening vigil Masses were introduced as satisfying the Sunday Mass obligation to “Keep holy the Lord’s Day” by attending Mass. My response varies but is almost always given with a twinkle in my eye. “Why of course it counts,” I respond. And I can see the “All right!” light up his face because he is covered. A twofer. Wedding and Sunday Mass obligation at the same Mass. Nice. Then I finish my sentence. “Of course it counts. Every Mass counts. But this wedding does not count for Sunday’s obligation” Downer. “Unless of course you would like to hang your eternal salvation on a twofer.” More of a downer.

What counts? What counts in life is a pretty common question. It has a twin brother. Who counts? Who counts in life? And who doesn’t count? Thing is—we don’t always even realize that we think like this but we do—a lot. When you’re out to dinner, does the waiter or waitress “count?” Meaning. Do they matter? Meaning: Do I treat them like a person or do I treat them like a servant? How about when you’re at WAWA? How about when you are out shopping and the sales clerk is ringing you up or the cashier is ringing up your groceries. Does that person count? Do you treat them as if they aren’t there or do they matter? Do you order them around as if they are your indentured servant? Or is there a politeness and a care for them as a person?

Do you ignore the flag men or women around a construction site or do you nod a thank you to them? How about the other drivers in the parking lot or on the road? Do they count? Or are they just drivers that you don’t know and not very good drivers at that. How about the people you see on the nightly news no matter their ethnicity, their religion, and their circumstances? Do some count and some not count? Do the goodies count and the baddies not count? Do we even hear ourselves? Do we ever step back and listen to some of the things we think and some of the things we say? How dismissive I can be of another person; how judgmental and condemnatory I can be. Especially in an election cycle. Wow there is a lot of people who don’t count as far as other people are concerned. How about those without homes of their own (the homeless), or places to stay, or safe countries to live in (refugees and some immigrants), or those of religions other than Christian?

Why do I go into all of this? Because this counting or not counting is not a new phenomenon. It is very ancient. It is at the heart of the story that Jesus tells today. For the rich guy the poor guy starving and begging at his gate is someone who doesn’t count. How can you tell? Well it is at least curious that the rich guy knows the poor guy’s name and recognizes him on the bosom of Abraham. The rich guy, even in the torment of the realm of the dead, still treats him like a servant to be ordered around. “Father Abraham, send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in cool water to quench my thirst.” For this guy Lazarus never counted—not in life, not now. He never treated him with any care or solicitude or thoughtfulness. It’s not as if the rich guy isn’t capable of such mindfulness. He is very mindful of the people in his own home, his own family. They count. They count a lot. But right there is the rub. They count in his mind but

only they count. Jesus has a different approach. Each person counts. Everyone is to be treated with respect—even sinners. And that is how Jesus lives. And that is how God acts.

We get busy. We get preoccupied. We get careless. We can actually become clueless in certain areas of our lives. We can become very judgmental and very selfish. And when discovered we have developed a pretty refined way of feigning ignorance when really the truth is we have allowed our hearts to harden. And there are a lot of people we don't really care about. And we have made a choice NOT to see, NOT to see that particular person as a person, as someone who truly counts and is worthy of respect and consideration.

Whether someone counts or not in my thinking does not always lead to active sins perpetrated towards or against the other. No, the attitude of who counts generates rather sins of omission. "I am sorry for what I have done and what I have failed to do," as we say in the Confiteor.

Sins of omission are just as truly sins as any other kind of sins. We really do have to guard against a kind of complacency from entering into our lives. From dividing up the world into goodies and baddies. The irony in the story is that there is this GREAT REVERSAL. The rich guy ends up begging for help but has placed himself beyond the realm of assistance by the way he lived. And Lazarus who begged and was ignored in life is no longer ignored but enjoys table fellowship with Abraham awaiting Jesus to open the gates of heaven.

The human mindset which decides who counts and who does not count is something that can exist on an individual level or a family level. It can exist on a parish level or a community level. It can even exist on a national level. It is pretty commonplace and we who believe in Jesus Christ know that there is something more that is asked of us and expected of us. We have been on the receiving end of many graces and blessings from Our Lord and he has always treated us with respect and forgiveness. It is fitting that he now turns to us and asks us to reciprocate, in his name, by living his way in our attitude towards each human being in this world.

This story has some very simple reminders in it.

- 1) There is a true freedom with which God has endowed each of us in this life.
- 2) There is grace, abundant grace Christ makes available to us every day.
- 3) There is a judgment day coming and what we do and do not do are on the table.

Let the one who has ears to hear—listen up.