

BULLETIN -- NOVEMBER 26

We hope your Thanksgiving weekend is proceeding smoothly, and that you are enjoying short reunions with family members and friends. Don't let Hollywood cynicism fill you with anxious fears or expectations of trouble. All the holiday "comedies" seem to be about dysfunctional relatives, rekindled rivalries, and stoked bitterness ruining everyone's life until they do it all again next year. Let your home and heart be a place where everyone can find a Christian acceptance and welcome. The respect we owe to one another because of Christ need not imply approval of bad manners or pagan lifestyles. I remember very well a holiday when I spent some time with a relative whom we all understood to be difficult. With a couple of leading questions, I was able to get him talking about his school days and military career with an animation that I had never seen. So don't give up on that feisty in-law or the shy new girl friend of your cousin's son. We've all had the experience of feeling much more welcome in a gathering where just one person came up and showed a genuine interest in us. Be that person.

Christ the King Sunday. We come to the final Sunday in the liturgical year, looking at Christ our King, recognizing our call to be his disciples, and looking ahead as his Bride, the Church, to our eternal union with him at the banquet table in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are not pie-in-the sky people. We don't have our heads in the clouds in such a way that we are of no earthly good. We believe that we have been created by God to be cooperators with him in the stewardship of all creation. We believe that we have a past, a present, and a future. That is how we experience time: memory, presence, and vision. Why would that be any different for a believer than it is for an atheist?

And yet we allow our experience of time to TEACH us that what we experience within the confines of human nature is but a preparation for the blessings of super-nature and of the life to come. We cannot clearly see the future on earth; and yet it eventually takes place, in the way we envisioned it or not. Eternal life with our heavenly Bridegroom is like that. We "can only imagine," as a popular evangelical hymn has it; and we can only be sure that what the Lord has in store for us is beyond anything we CAN imagine.

Make use of this Christ the King Sunday to grow in your love and affection for him. Not just a warm, fuzzy feeling, mind you. We're talking about the love of a disciple for the master, the intertwining life commitment of bride and groom with and for each other. How often do you ask yourself, when circumstances call for it, the question that was popularly found on bracelets back about 15 years ago: "W.W.J.D.?" What Would Jesus Do in my situation? How would he act? What would he have ME do in response to the challenge of the moment? That kind of question can really be life-changing if we take it seriously. So many of our conversations and pastimes would take on a more constructive character if we had to answer that question honestly.

Can we really let ourselves waste so much of our time on earth with pursuits that lead nowhere, when we have an Eternal Shepherd inviting us to be his missionaries? Ask him for the fire of the Holy Spirit to drop down afresh on you. Attend to the words of the hymn which our choir sometimes sings after Communion: "Jesus, my Lord, my God, my all, how can I love thee as I ought? And how reverent this wondrous gift, so far surpassing hope or thought?" Christ our King, increase our heart's devotion to you!

It's been in the news. The recent church tragedy in Texas has generated conversation among pastors and law enforcement about what to do "in case." Let's talk turkey here, folks, and not just because this is Thanksgiving weekend. Of course we have to take proper precautions, but all the prep in the world cannot totally eliminate the remote possibility of some violent disturbance during any event, even a church service. We don't like to think about it, but while we are engaged in worship and *spiritual* warfare, a hostile actor might see us as just another place of public assembly, and perhaps as a religious or personal enemy. The perpetrator in Texas seems to have taken out his wrath on people who were dear to his mother-in-law, who was not there on November 5. His victims seem to have had absolutely nothing to do with his insane rage, which had a long history. How can anyone defend against that, in ANY place, public or private?

We can't physically or emotionally afford to be constantly on edge. We don't need everybody diving for cover when firecrackers go off outside church, as they often do, especially during the summer. Before Mass several Tuesday evenings ago, some neighborhood urchins ran into church and tossed plastic water bottles with frozen contents inside to make as much racket as possible. A prank. Can you imagine the uproar if a nervous churchgoer with a CPL (concealed pistol license) had opened fire and shot one of those kids? Granted, good CPL training should theoretically weed out a trigger-happy Barney Fife type. But you can see the problem with being overly cautious, or jumpy. You will recall that we have had experiences with mentally disturbed people who disrupted services to a greater or lesser extent, but who were not a physical threat to anyone. Certainly, it might be unsettling; but no one would want to see them harmed when they were merely acting out their psychosis. But sometimes it's hard to tell, especially if you're not familiar with the people and the surroundings.

The unfortunate fact is, if someone comes into any place of public assembly fully intending to do harm (including ultimately to himself), someone is going to get hurt. In such a situation, our goal has to be to minimize the injury as best we can. If such a thing occurs during Mass or any other church service, the priest usually has the best view of what's going on. I can assure you that, in the case of a sudden emergency (weather, roof collapse, armed invader), if I were aware of it I would shout (and I *can* shout!), "EMERGENCY! TAKE COVER! UNDER THE PEWS!" In any such emergency, with the average age and mobility of our congregation and the wide-open nature of our church worship space, that would be the very best direction I can think of. Of course, those nearest the exits could and should flee that way if possible, leaving exit doors wide open behind them for others. But for the rest, hunkering down and huddling low under the pews would provide some protection from falling debris, flying glass, or incoming rounds. In the case of an armed invader, it would make it more necessary for him to move down the aisles, focusing on targets, and perhaps giving ushers or others a chance to move around and take him down from behind, in any way possible.

You can find all sorts of things wrong with this procedure, but I think it's important that we have SOME understanding of SOMETHING we could do to minimize harm and injury in the unlikely event of an emergency, whether from natural or human causes. And as always, the BEST thing we can do is to conduct ourselves virtuously, and to pray for contagious peace and tranquility of mind in this troubled world, where we are at all times called to give courageous witness to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We

don't have to be sitting ducks for those who would do us harm, but neither should we fear our summons home. "You know not the day nor the hour" is not a *threat* from the Lord, but a wonderful promise of eternal life which we should anticipate with joy, and be Advent-ready at every moment. And in case you hadn't noticed, that's next week already! God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Passing your interests and talents on to your children is a fine thing. Helping them discover their own is an even finer thing.