

Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

Back in the late 1970's the closest thing my college buddies and I had to a ritual took place on Saturday nights.

- a. We would order pizza, but it had nothing to do with eating
- b. And yes there would be beer, but we actually drank little of it.
- c. What it had to do with was watching a TV show which was so scandalous that the only time NBC could broadcast it was at 11:30 p.m.
 - i. Of course the show was *Saturday Night Live*.
2. One of the things I loved about the show was the fake commercials they would slip into the normal advertising.
 - i. One of my favorites featured this white-bread American family sitting in a room decorated for Christmas.
 - ii. As they advertised a record called, *the Dysfunctional Family Christmas*.
 - iii. One of the songs they sang still sticks in my mind
 - (1) It was called something like "The perfect Christmas"
 - (a) And it was about trying to make everything perfect for mom's visit at Christmas; the tree is perfect the food is perfect the gifts are perfect,
 - (b) but of course nothing is perfect for mom who comes and rips everything to shreds.
3. The song was hysterical . . . but if we laughed (and we did)
 - a. it was because it also was true.
 - i. For holidays, especially the coming Holiday season
 - (1) are at time of great stress and anxiety for many,
 - (2) precisely because there are these expectations we feel
 - (a) everything has to be perfect,
 - (b) we have to be perfect
 - (c) and yet we know we will never be.
4. And what is true about Christmas, in fact is true about the rest of the year,
 - a. For we feel this anxiety in many different places.
 - i. At home we feel it from our husbands and our wives,
 - ii. At school we feel it from our teachers and our coaches.
 - iii. At work we feel it from our bosses and coworkers
 - iv. All expecting us to be perfect, and yet we know in our heart of hearts we can never be.
5. And while you would at first think it should be the last place we feel this anxiety, for many of us the first place we feel it is not at home or school or at work, but at Church.
 - a. For here the expectations of moral perfection are at their strongest
 - b. And moreover the one whose expectations we strive to live up to is not an imperfect husband, a boss or a mother,
 - c. Whom we might be able to fool at least some of the time,
 - d. But is God who is by definition perfect and who sees everything, especially those

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- secret imperfections which we fool other into believing do not exist.
6. That anxiety is especially intense for some on another “holiday”
 - a. the feast day of All Souls Day which we celebrated this past Thursday.
 7. For we Catholics taught and still do teach that all those who die who are less than perfect, though not bad enough to go to hell, go to a place called purgatory, to be purified of the effects their sins had on their lives, in preparation for heaven.
 - a. Catholics of a certain generation would remember
 - i. the threats of the fires of purgatory we would endure
 - ii. the prayers we were encouraged to say,
 - iii. The Good works we were encouraged to do
 - iv. the efforts we were to make on behalf of the poor souls in purgatory,
 - (1) so that their time there would be relatively brief
 - b. And that through our perfect works they might enjoy the perfection of heaven.
 8. And yet we knew and know, that our works were not, are not perfect;
 - a. and that neither are we.
 9. It is little wonder that many people give up the practice of such a faith.
 - a. For if being a person of faith is about being perfectly faithful to God,
 - i. well then who could ever be? No one.
 10. Which is why it is so astounding that so many people were drawn to Jesus,
 - a. For these people who were following Jesus were Jewish, as he was.
 11. Judaism was, is a religion with VERY clear laws, and thus clear expectations.
 - a. To be perfectly faithful to God meant being perfectly faithful to God’s Laws.
 - i. and in Jesus’s day that meant not just the ten commandments, but all the rules and regulations derived by the Pharisees and the scribes from those commandments.
 - (1) These rules were meant to help follow them, but often they were so complex,
 - (2) That many felt that only the scribes and the pharisees could ever hope to follow them.
 12. One day a scribe approached Jesus with a question
 - a. Which is the first Commandment.
 - i. Which is the commandment that if I follow, will guide me in my following of all the others?
 - b. When Jesus responds, however, he does not cite any of the rules or regulations that the Pharisees or the scribes devised;
 - c. Not does he mention any of he “big ten” rather, quoting Deuteronomy, he states simply, that the greatest commandment isn’t strictly speaking a commandment at all - it is love. Love God, Jesus says.
 - i. Love your neighbor; do that, and that is faithfulness enough.
 - d. And if that were all he said, well then that would be enough

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- e. But he says something else; something we often miss, but dare not;
- f. For he began by saying "The Lord is your God, the Lord alone."
- g. In the Hebrews Scriptures
 - i. This as the way God introduces the 10 commandments; and for Israel these words mean
 - (1) That everything God says,
 - (2) everything God does;
 - (3) the faithfulness that God asks and the love that God commands is based faithfulness..
 - h. But not on our faithfulness; be it to one another, to the Law or even to God.
 - i. But on God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness to Jesus, and through him to us.
 - ii. Jesus does not expect us to be perfectly faithful.
 - iii. For the one who sees everything knows we are not.
 - iv. Rather, he calls us simply to loving service of God and one another,
 - (1) and to leave the perfection up to God.
- 13. That had to be what that scribe was looking for
 - a. the promise that there was someone who would always be faithful to him
 - b. even when he had been less that faithful.
- 14. That had to be what moved those first disciples after Jesus resurrection to tell others about it; the promise that there was someone whose faithfulness was so perfect that it brought Jesus from death back into life.
- 15. That has to be what moves us to pray for the deceased as we will do especially this month of November, but really whenever we pray.
 - a. The Promise that there is someone who accepts and loves all those who have died with a perfect love,
 - b. even when they had been less that perfect.
- 16. And that must be what people hear again from our pulpits and in our classrooms, from the prays we pray with our children to the papal encyclicals we receive from Rome,
 - a. If we ever hope
 - i. to reach the people who avoid the Church like a dysfunctional family,
 - ii. To offer them the Promise that in a world filled with anxiety, that the God of Jesus Christ is someone who expects perfection from no one, but asks faithfulness from all.
 - iii. to teach that faith to our children
 - iv. to proclaim that faith through the way we act and speak.
 - v. In short to be faithful . . . And to leave the perfection up to God, who even when we are less than perfect, is faithful, perfectly faithful to us.