

Homily by Fr. Robert J. Schrader of June 9-10, 2018, 10th Sunday of Ordinary Time (Cycle B) at Peace of Christ Parish

As we return to the Sundays of Ordinary Time today on the 10th Sunday of that church season in Cycle B of our liturgical readings, we re-join Mark's Gospel in chapter 3 where Jesus' own family says of him, "He is out of his mind!" I think some in my family said the same thing of me at our Parish Dinner last month. Jesus' response to *his* family was "if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand" which is another way of saying "if I'm crazy, so are you!" When I tried that one on my family, they did not appreciate it. But one thing we can ALL appreciate is Jesus' opening the possibility of each of us being a part of his family: "Whoever does the will of God is" my family. Being a part of Jesus' family sometimes is crazy, sometimes is sacrificial, but always is salvific.

When I preached on this occasion two years ago this month, I mentioned that I had thought back then that that would have been my "farewell homily" to you. As it was, with the 3-year extension "til my retirement age of 70" granted me by Bishop Matano at that time so that I could remain close to my dying mother, it was rather a "2nd 6-year-term term-end report" with some thoughts on the 3 years which lie ahead. Well, with the subsequent raising of retirement age for me to 72, this is once again some thoughts on the 3 years ahead. Each year at this time, we have done a mini-version of this "taking-stock of things" by looking back over the preceding year and then making our individual commitments of Time, Talent, and Treasure for the year ahead. This year's version of that will be rolled out this week in the mail as we each receive an updated Time-Talent-Treasure commitment form with the hope that its simplicity will enable everyone to fill it in and bring it back to church next weekend to drop in the collection along with our regular offerings.

As we look at the "**Time**" section of the flyer that we will receive, we will find both a number of ways in which to give back to the Lord a portion of our week in responding to real needs and a number of sample good deeds to be done in the living of the Gospel message. As we look at the "**Talent**" section, we will have the opportunity to re-commit to ministries and programs in which we are currently involved, or perhaps sign up for a new avenue of investing our giftedness for God and for our peer parishioners. As we look at the "**Treasure**" section, we may find a new mode of supporting the Church inviting our participation.

Indeed, as we set about completing this year's Time-Talent-Treasure commitment form, I ask all of us to ponder a few reflections shared here as we determine how best to respond to current needs. As you may have noticed in our weekly bulletin, our giving this past year has not sufficiently kept pace with the budgeted amount for weekly plate collections at Mass. This is most likely due to the one main factor that, though many individuals did increase their weekly giving two years ago when we conducted an increased giving campaign as part of our Time-Talent-Treasure process, we did not repeat that ask last year, so giving stayed flat. Although we are vigilant in monitoring and controlling expenses, there are many fixed costs of doing business that are out of our control. Such fixed costs as heating, utilities, insurance, repairs and maintenance of our many buildings are ones that are inevitable and that increase with the cost of living.

Two years ago when I spoke on this topic, I shared the numerous ways in which the parish had trimmed down so as to cut expenses since 2004 to be as responsibly frugal as we were able. In 2004, we had 3 separate offices, bulletins, parish councils and committees of every type. That went down to only one of each. We had 4 pastoral assistants/ministers/visitors. As of July, we will have only two. We had four paid music instrumentalists on staff in 2004. Now we have only two. We had three faith formation personnel in 2004. Now we have only one. In 2004, we had four office administrative assistants. Now we have only two. We had three business persons. Now we have one Finance Director and a bookkeeper. We had four priests serving our three formerly separate parishes. In these fourteen years, we have reduced that to three, and—in those several years when we were not blessed with a newly ordained—to two.

Also, in those 14 years, as buildings were no longer needed, we leased the empty space to bring income into the parish. We have also wisely invested any savings so that interest from them could help alleviate any shortfalls. A number of our former-now-deceased parishioners have also been very generous in leaving us bequests, and these have always saved the day when they were actually received. Any gift was carefully managed and utilized with great thought and planning or saved for our stable patrimony. Lastly, a capital campaign which we had for some big-ticket items like parking lots, boilers and roofs was very successful in helping us keep our facilities in tip-top shape for the ministries which they house. If I were to have left the parish at the end of the original 12-year appointment I was first given, I would have done so feeling good about what we had accomplished with what we had and what we were able to raise. Parishioners here have been very good at stepping to the plate when needs were clear and they valued the goal.

As I look forward, once again to these next three years themselves, I do have some concerns. And, as I said two years ago, lest we get to a point where I would have to stand here and tell you "some big changes are a-coming" and you would reply "if you had told us about this, we could have done something," I'm putting it all on the table right now so that we can do something as we collectively ponder our Time, Talent, and Treasure commitments for the year to come. My concerns are three:

First, a parish is supposed to sustain itself by being able to pay for its staffing, programing, and facility expenses from its ordinary Sunday offertory plate. Though we have taken all the creative steps that we have as mentioned above with regard to staffing and leases and investments, we are now once again—after this past year of rather flat giving unchanged from the year before—able to balance our budget only by regularly dipping into savings. This is not for lack of vigilance over our resources, but more for lack of sufficiently keeping pace with our giving levels, adjusting for inflation as best we can on a regular yearly basis.

Second, all of those big-ticket items tended-to by our earlier capital campaign have a natural cycling back into a state of need, and only plate collection adjustments and special gifts can meet such need. In the year ahead, we have need to re-do our parking lots, tend to some aging & finicky HVAC systems, and fix up by way of painting and repairing a number of items on our Facilities Committee agenda.

And third, though it is improving, there seems to still be only a rather slow movement on the part of Catholic parishioners almost everywhere to do what is common in many other denominations. That is, tithing and automatic transfers. When I came here in 2004, I

discerned that I needed to do both in order to be able to invite others to do the same. With regard to tithing, I mentioned two years ago that one parishioner who had been a recent convert shared a story that in some Protestant churches with which that parishioner was familiar, the pastor meets with new members to go over their tax forms with them in determining how much they should give. We would never even think of doing that, but it certainly is something we can each do ourselves with our own returns. Tithing is Biblical, giving the first 10% of one's wage or crop or herd to the Lord; that is, determining from the get-go that 90% of what I make will be sufficient for the needs of me and my family, but the first 10% goes right to the Lord. We read right in the first book of the Bible of how Abram gave 1/10 of all he had to Melchizedek. Usually people divvy this up by giving 5% to their parish where they regularly worship and where they go to have their babies baptized, their children educated in the faith and trained for Penance and Communion and Confirmation, their young adults married, their sick anointed and visited in hospitals and homes, and their dead buried; and the other 5% goes to all the other charities that they also support. Suggested solutions to these concerns are three as well, and I encourage you to take each of them to prayer for discernment.

First, join me and a growing number of our parishioners in using "automatic funds transfer" to make your contributions. Though parishioners do go away from time to time (and then we fail to receive a steady stream of support in their absence), automatic funds transfer keeps the flow even and steady throughout the year. The Lord knows, our utility bills and paychecks to employees and other bills *do* come around *very* regularly, so anything we can do to keep the income stream just as even and steady will be appreciated. We can have these funds come automatically from our checking or savings account or from one of our charge cards (heck, you could even earn points!). When I began using this method, I actually increased my tithing a bit to eat any of the modest processing fees the church might incur. But my giving is now very regular and I no longer have to bother receiving packets of envelopes (which *saves* the church money) as it all happens automatically without them. Please, be encouraged on the Time-Talent-Treasure form you will receive to check the box labeled "I am interested in receiving information about automatic transfer. Please send me information" and we will be in touch with you.

Second, if a parish's collection is healthy enough, it shouldn't need frequently repeated capital campaigns. Whether you do automatic funds transfers or not, please be regular in making your offering (and/or remember to do make-up offerings at least at Christmas and Easter or the end of the fiscal year). Indeed, a related step might be to heed the global Church's mission of the New Evangelization: bring a neighbor or relative or friend to church so hopefully they, too, will become active and supporting members of the parish. If there is education or healing to be done in order for this to happen, we won't know about it until you tell us. You are often better-placed than any of us on staff because your knowledge of such individuals is first-hand. So be regular, and spread the word, and allow your wonderful staff then to reach out to tend wounds, and educate, and welcome home those currently without a base. Bring them to *ChristLife* this Fall.

And third, don't dismiss "tithing" too quickly. We Catholics sell ourselves short because we don't see the big picture or want to take the plunge. On a trip I took a while back, I visited a friend in another state. He told me that at their parish they tithe, and he gets to send his children to Catholic School tuition-free from Kindergarten to 12th grade. Not bad! But when *everyone* is tithing, a parish can afford to do that and pay their faculty a competitive salary to keep them in the parochial system. If you do not feel able to go from 0% to 5% right off the bat, the Time-Talent-Treasure form gives some 3% and 1% levels to try. But please remember to adjust that level in future years until you reach that **5%**. I know of no 5% giver who is starving or impoverished because of tithing. And yet if you still may need a little more time before you feel comfortable to commit to a tithe (after all, the Lord wants only a cheerful giver, *II Corinthians 9:7*), then at least commit to increase your current level of giving (if you are not already tithing at one end of the spectrum or are truly unable at the other end of the spectrum) by one-third. That is, if you are giving \$3 a week right now, can you give \$4? If you are giving \$6, can you give \$8? That is the type of modest increase needed in order to begin fully erasing that weekly negative number in the bulletin regarding meeting our needed budgeted amount for the Sunday plate collection. And by all means, if there is some special need for which you wish to contribute (such as new computers for the school or office, a new freezer for the school kitchen, etc.), call us so we can make it happen!

Lastly, regarding our wonderful School, it is a gift right in our front yard, the only parochial Pre-K—5th grade Catholic elementary school located in a parish based in the east side of the City of Rochester. Our test scores out-rank those of the City schools around us. Yet, with lack of increasing funding coming from the diocese (because of decreasing funding coming to them from former corporate benefactors), it becomes more challenging each year to maintain a balanced overall parish budget. With tithing and automatic funds transfer, however, it is possible. We don't have to look to far-off places to identify a worthy mission to support. Even now, I have several requests for extraordinary circumstances. Special gifts to the school (such as sponsoring an individual child's education all the way from entry to graduation as is common in the Nativity Schools, or such as contributing to the "new uniforms fund" for this Fall) and regular tithing and automatic funds transfer enable even these needs to be met. Indeed, may we all be grateful to one another for what each of us will do as we mark and return our Time-Talent-Treasure forms next week—for the parish, for the school, for us all.

In closing, I repeat what I said when we entered upon our capital campaign one decade ago. I will consider our collective response to this 3-part appeal—the appeal for increased offertory plate (whether through tithing or simply increasing our offering by one-third), the appeal for the adoption of automatic funds transfer by us all, and the appeal for special support for our school—I will consider this appeal to be successful whether our funds increase or not. If our collection sufficiently increases, that is you saying to us all, "Let's support our ability to continue what we have begun and make it better!" If our collection does *not* sufficiently increase, that is you saying to us all, "Let us begin to eliminate these programs and/or these staff members and/or these separate sites." The latter of these choices will only weaken the Church's presence in the community of which we have been a vital part for over a century. The former will make that presence stronger and enable us to move forward confidently as we implement Pope Francis' prescriptions for a world touched thoroughly by the Gospel of Joy, governed by a heart of mercy, and affording accessible opportunities for us to gather to *worship* our God, *educate* our young, and evangelize the poor who come to our doors for *both*, simply because we are here. So, when others look at us, at what we believe and how we support our Church and say, "You are out of your mind!", let us remind them and ourselves that we do what we do with our faith and its fiscal support because we choose to do the will of Jesus so to be family to him and with one another in the world!