

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz
Sirach 27:30-28:7
Romans 14:7-9
Matthew 18:21-35

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 10-11, 2011

Once again, good afternoon everyone. (Everyone replies.) I thought I had better not put you to sleep that quickly. Again, a special thanks. I am really delighted by the way that you're wearing liturgical colors; that was a good, quick line. I appreciate that.

It is a great joy actually to welcome a new pastor. And I know that I've talked with many people from St. Stephen Martyr, Fr. Randy where you were; and while they have welcomed and are really happy to welcome Fr. Harry, they still say, but we do miss Fr. Randy. I know your energy and your love of others, and really your pastoral care. I know that from the beginning it's been a wonderful time in these four years for me to work with you. You know, you were the first one who got me to substitute for a mass for you. So be very careful! And I remember you were going for surgery, and you said, "Archbishop, are you available such and such time to take a mass?" I said, "I would be happy to do so." And it really was good. I think I got a flu shot that day too. So it was a package deal.

This is a busy time of year isn't it? Are any of you football fans? All the games are over? Well, I was at the game last night, and it was a tough game; but that Hilton kid is worth keeping your eye on. He's a good ballplayer. And I think, am I right, that the Cats won today because I couldn't get it on TV. I think I'm taping it actually, but I couldn't figure out what channel it was on. And if some of you are worried, you're thinking he's from Pennsylvania. He's going to miss the Penn State-Alabama game, don't worry. I'm taping that. What else? Some of you nodded your heads. Are you Hoosier fans? There can't be any other games here, no. Well good. Are you a Hoosier fan? Well, you want to lay low here.

Really I want to reflect with you, but we don't have that much time, because there's a part of the ceremony that involves – and it's really a beautiful part – the installation of the pastor. Some of you may not have seen this. It is a beautiful ceremony within the church, so I'll try to make room for that.

But I wanted to talk about three things. First of all, I thought it would be important for us to take a few moments to reflect upon 9/11, and our response – both as a nation and the world, and as individuals to 9/11.

Then I want to talk to you about \$20 that I gave to someone in August of 1971. It's none of you, so I'm not trying to collect it. But I want to talk about that little action that I did – last month it would have been 40 years ago.

And then thirdly, just briefly to present, to prepare ourselves for the role of pastor, because I think it all fits together.

So first of all 9/11. This past week I got an e-mail that gave me a link to a video that was on the Memorial where the twin towers were. Maybe some of you saw it. I found it to be very moving. It was called "Reflecting Absence." I didn't realize this. This memorial, they began doing it I think in 2008, and it's now completed. And I haven't seen it. Maybe some of you have been to Manhattan and seen it. Actually I'm going to Manhattan on the 22nd of this month so maybe I'll have a chance to see it. But it said that there were 2,753 people who lost their life by really an act of terrorism. And of the people who had died, they said that they tried for many, many months to find the remains, because you and I know that when a loved one of ours dies, we want to be close to them. We want to honor and respect the remains. We often visit, many of you probably visit, the cemetery of loved ones. And so for many people, I think it was 40% of the people who died, those families, really their gravesite will be where the memorial for 9/11 is, called "Reflecting Absence."

Many of us, certainly I do, have mixed feelings. I understand, any of us who travel in airports know how dramatically it changed things. I think, at least it seems to me, to get more stringent; and it seems that the people who are having you go through are getting more bossy. I don't know if that's true or not, but I think we're all happy – at least I am – that things are safeguarded, etc. and you have to go through certain things. But it has had an effect on our life, and it makes – I would say as a nation – people very cautious. And maybe even, and this is where the readings come in, finding it difficult to forgive. Because we don't really make distinctions between what it means to forgive someone and what it means to safeguard and restore trust. They are two important and distinct things. Little Johnny messed up his room and didn't make his bed, and his parents yelled at him. And he ran out screaming. He finally came back an hour later and tried, and he said, "Aw Mom and Dad, I'm sorry for overreacting." His Mom and his Dad grabbed and hugged him and said, "Johnny, we forgive you. We love you. We're

going to love you in good times and in bad.” And so he felt real good. Now the room still had to be fixed. And so there is a distinction between forgiving someone and restoring trust, or restoring responsibility. So I’m not making any claims that we ought not to be very careful in protecting the innocent and restoring, in that sense, trust.

But having said that, I thought it was interesting that Pope Benedict sent a letter that was hand signed, which there are often formal letters sent, but this one was on the occasion of 9/11, and some of you may have seen the news report of it, in which he talked about the courage and generosity of the American people. Courage and generosity. Now courage I would have predicted. But generosity. And I think it somehow means that as we courageously face real threats in our world – because we do live in a world that in many cases is not completely safe – we have to be careful. And I think you and I would agree on this that we do not become jaded, distrustful and angry inside. Here’s what the catechism of the catholic church says. *Christian prayer extends the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciple (the follower) by configuring him to his master.* In other words, if there is any way in which we come to resemble Jesus Christ, it will be our effort to forgive, and even to take a chance on people. And that’s in a sense a reflection as we pray for the victims, the families, and our whole nation and our world that we seek justice, that we seek protection of the innocent, but in a way that doesn’t make us become ourselves frightened, shriveled up, and caring only about ourselves.

Not let me get to...I mentioned the \$20. So I was a deacon, and it was in St. Joseph’s in Limeport. This is outside of Allentown, Pennsylvania. It was a little country town, actually a suburb area now, but it was really a farm area that was becoming suburban. I was assigned as the deacon that summer from June until August. In August the pastor took a day or two off. He came back afterwards, and he said, “Did anything happen?” And I said, “Well, not too much. But there was a gentleman who came to the door. He was from Plattsburgh, New York.” I still remember. I’ve never been to Plattsburgh, New York, but I remember that’s what he said. He said he was from Plattsburgh, New York. He asked if I had \$20 to give him, and would I drive him to the bus station. Limeport was about 12 to 13 miles away from downtown Allentown. I didn’t have that much money. Twenty dollars in those days was a lot, and if you didn’t have any money, it was a real lot. So I gave him the \$20, and I drove him to the bus station. When the pastor came back and I reported to him that I did that. He said to me, “Well, you just got taken.” So, you are not going to believe this, but not every day do I do this, but every once in awhile I think, “I wonder if that guy from Plattsburgh, New York is

going to give me my 20 bucks back.” I have this image. You know how Jesus said a hundredfold, that he’s going to come and he’s going to say, “You were a deacon and here’s two thousand dollars.” It’s a hundredfold, right? Isn’t that what scripture says? So I think part of it is not wanting to be taken. Who wants to be taken, right? And I guess I kind of resent it. I was wet behind the ears and what not. I still would do it again I think, and I hope you would too.

But then it dawned on me that that is not the way it works. The way it works, and that’s what the gospel parable is about, is I arrived on earth without doing anything to choose my parents – and boy, God gave me great parents. I didn’t choose them. In many ways, I neglected them. But he gave me good parents. When I made mistakes and had sins, I learned...gosh I guess I went to confession in second grade...and people say in second grade what do kids know? Well, I knew. So I had no trouble figuring out what sin was in second grade. I knew that I was doing things wrong. I guess they weren’t things that would make the newspaper, but God forgave me.

And it seems to me that in a sense.... Probably next week I’ll think again. I wonder if that guy from Plattsburgh is going to come. There’s something in us that just thinks maybe it’ll happen. But really the gospel message isn’t about that is it? It is about the fact that we return love to others, and we even take chance on others because God has taken a chance on us. It’s not rocket science. And yet it’s the very core of what it means to be a follower of Christ. It’s why we’re supposed to stick out like sore thumbs that maybe rejects and calls forth the forgiveness and the helping of others.

Now I say that because, and this is the third part – the last part, when we look at the role of the pastor, in fact when we look at any role of leadership in the church, it is Jesus who said to people in authority, do not lord it over people, but I have come not to be served, but to serve. And so you’ll hear in the installation prayers about the priest’s duty to preach God’s word in and out of season, to preach the truth of our faith. You’ll hear about the responsibility to celebrate with holiness and enthusiasm and grace and joy, the sacraments, most especially the Holy Eucharist. And you’ll hear about the pastoral care and concern and protection for the faithful that is the role of a priest. Of course, many of you in your vocations will have roles of authority and roles of service to others, so we need to pray for one another. The reason we have an installation is to slow us down a little bit, help us not to take for granted each other, and pray in a special way for your new pastor that he will rely upon the grace of Christ, that he also will be willing to take chances and risks forgiving when there’s injury, and seeking out pardon when

others are harmed or hurt. And that indeed we will continue to come to resemble the person of peace as Christ, because that's what it says in the catechism of the catholic church. I forget what number this is. A Christian prayer extends the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciples by configuring him to his master. We want to become like Christ.

God bless you.