

Today's first reading warns us about placing our trust in human beings: "Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD." This is directly connected the woes Jesus warns about in the gospel. "Woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are filled, woe to you who laugh, woe to you when all speak well of you." The problem with those things mentioned in the gospel is that they can lead us to believe we are fully independent from each other and from God. Those things can lead to pride. They can lead us to value material things instead of our relationship with God. They can do all those but they don't necessarily have to. There are very wealthy people who are very humble and generous and have a great love for God and know that he is the source of their good fortune. At the same time, not having enough money to live on or those other things can make people very materialistic and bitter. Matthew's version of the beatitudes gives a little more context and a fuller explanation to what we just heard from Luke. The overall message here is that when we place all our faith in human beings and material things, we are much more likely to be let down and we often fail to recognize God's work in our lives.

Overdependence on ourselves, other people, and material things is a problem, but God does work through people. We have the scriptures because the Holy Spirit inspired their human authors. We are an apostolic church because God inspired and worked through the apostles and their successors to hand on the faith down through the centuries. God even shares his authority with human leaders. We see this in the scriptures with the institutions of the Eucharist, baptism and the sacrament of reconciliation. The Old Testament shows us how God chose men like Abraham and Moses and David to lead his people. He still works through our leaders today. Of course God also gave us free will which makes it possible for us to abuse the power he has given us. Now just a couple of questions for reflection and then I am going to address a couple of local concerns.

Do we respect the authority God has given to others when they use that authority appropriately? How do we respond when we see power used unjustly in ways which are contrary to God's will? How do we use the gifts and talents God has given to us? Are we aware of his actions in our lives and our dependence upon him? Are we aware of how God wants to work through us?

Now for two local things. As you guys know, I had to make the difficult decision to cancel Masses last weekend because conditions were unsafe due to snow and ice. Then I had to communicate that decision. My job would have been

much easier if every household and family who attend Masses here were signed up for Flocknote. This is a very efficient way for us to send out texts and emails to let you know about things like cancelled Masses or downed power lines, both of which have happened in the past few months here. Not everyone has email or gets text messages, but they probably know someone who does. I am asking each family to have at least one responsible adult signed up for Flocknote who will make sure that important information gets communicated to everyone in the family who needs it.

The other way we communicate parish news is via the parish website. Please check that regularly, especially when we get extreme weather. The parish is at 2160 feet in elevation so if you see that the snow level is at or below 2000 feet, it might be a good idea to check what conditions are like at the parish before you come here. During these events, I update the website daily and sometimes even more frequently. You will help us out a lot by signing up for Flocknote and checking the parish website.

Of the utmost importance is how we treat Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist. The Church clearly and explicitly teaches that the Eucharist must be consumed immediately once it is distributed during Holy Communion. It cannot be taken away from the church except by one of our trained and authorized homebound communion ministers. We have an ongoing problem with people who believe they can do otherwise. No you cannot. Under no circumstances is someone to receive the Eucharist, pretend to consume it, and then put it in a purse or a pocket. The consequences of doing so can be quite grave, including the possibility of an automatic excommunication which can only be lifted by the Vatican. To prevent this from happening again, Deacon or myself must see you consume the Eucharist immediately, right in front of us. You may not take a single step away from us. This is the teaching and law of the universal Church. This law is given to us because Jesus has entrusted his body and blood into our hands. Jesus has given us power over his body. With great power comes great responsibility. We must not abuse that power and gift that Jesus has given us.