

Last week Monica and I attended a retreat with many of the deacons of our diocese and their wives. Our retreat master was a retired bishop. He's actually an archbishop with quite a history. He had spent his active episcopal career heading up different dioceses and acting in several capacities, including Papal Nuncio, for the Vatican all over the world, from the Midwest to the Caribbean, to the Middle East, Africa, Ukraine and throughout Europe. I noticed he presented several traits that I have often seen in older priests, including bishops. First, they tend to be full of God's mercy, whether it's in conversation, a homily, or in the confessional. They say that with age comes wisdom. Maybe there's a good lesson in that.

Another trait I've noticed is that retired bishops are generally *really happy*. Think about it, most men are called to the priesthood to what they believe is ministering directly to the people of God either in a specific ministry or more likely in a parish setting. However, once a priest becomes a bishop, he is often removed from much of that as he has his administrative and other episcopal responsibilities. He is a shepherd, but much less hands on. When he

retires, he can jump back in to where the action is. Or as Pope Francis says, down to where he can smell the sheep.

One other trait that I've noticed with retired priests and bishops, is they get a lot more practical. They focus less on catechism and theology and more on what's going on in our daily lives. Last week the bishop's message for the deacons on retreat was to recognize the value in their long-term presence in the ministries and life of the parish. And if you think about it, that is true for almost all of us. The real action of our Church is not what makes the news. It's not in Rome, the Vatican, or the Synod. It's down here.

I think that's partly what Jesus was getting at in our Gospel reading today. The scribes and Pharisees were *supposedly* followers of Moses, but they set themselves apart. They liked their fancy garments, titles, and privileges. They wanted to look greater than they were, taking credit for the work of others. We all know folks like that. Because they wouldn't come down and mingle with the people, the sheep, they couldn't shepherd them. They couldn't serve them. And that's the key.

Jesus, although divine, didn't act or dress like He was above others. He came down to our level. He interacted with the sheep. He sought out and ministered to the lost sheep. He spoke directly in ways that the “folks” could understand yet confused the high and mighty. He made it very clear: we are called to serve others... just as He did for us.

In His great mercy, Christ died for our salvation. And He invites us to join Him in working out that salvation by voluntarily serving others. And it's happening all around us. It's what the Church is all about. And do you know how and where most of the sacrificial service happens in this world? I'll give you a hint. It's a sacrament. No, it's not Holy Orders. It's through Matrimony. Most people are called to mirror the love of Jesus Christ in marriage and then, in extension, their family in the domestic church: the home. If in that marriage, the love of the spouses truly reflects the love Christ has for us, that marriage becomes a fountain of graces. And flowing from that comes well-adjusted and confident children and that bodes well for the world and future generations. Sounds like the Kingdom of Heaven on earth to me.

Those who are single must serve... their neighbors. Often this is through their extended family, their occupation, and volunteering in and outside of the Church. Those in Holy Orders are to serve us all in the Church. Everyone serves in some capacity if they can. And do you know what comes from all that service besides a healthier and holy society? Happiness, real happiness. Not the mere contentment or self-seeking temporary pleasure the world tries to sell. No, real happiness, as pointed out in the Beatitudes, comes from serving and loving others.

This past Wednesday we celebrated the saints in heaven on All Saint's Day. I suspect they had a taste of true happiness on earth and are now experiencing eternal joy in the presence of God, who is love. Let us follow their example and answer the call of Christ... to work out our salvation in service and love to one another.