

27 Sunday B

October 7, 2018

St. Patrick's

Theme: "...Until death do us part"—really?

"...Until death do us part."

A permanent commitment. Forever...It sure seems like a long time.

"...Until death do us part." I'm somewhat of an outsider on this whole marriage thing. However, I know what a permanent commitment is. I made one forty-five years ago when I was ordained a deacon. That's when you make a public commitment for life to ordained ministry.

Now, friends, I never heard a voice from God, clearly telling me to be a priest. I discerned within, and sensed a calling from God. Oh, a month before ordination, I was, for the most part, at peace about committing publicly to ordained ministry for life. Nonetheless, "forever" seemed a long time, and I felt the awesome seriousness of the whole thing.

A month before ordination, our seminary had a major speech given by one of the renowned Bible scholars at that time, Father Barnabas Ahern. In a significant way he contributed his biblical insights at the Second Vatican Council from 1962 through 1965.

His talk was about interior poverty. Now, Father Ahern was a magnificent orator. He not only spoke with terrific insights; he spoke poetically and gracefully. At one point in his talk—I can remember it vividly—Father Ahern raised the issue of making a permanent commitment or promise. I was riveted to what he was going to say. I leaned forward in my seat and focused fully on his words. He kept raising the question, "Can you make a permanent decision—a decision for life?" Oh, I knew what his answer would be—of course, a "yes." Father Ahern lifted up the question, and at the perfect moment he let it hang there in mid-air: "Can you make a permanent decision—a decision for life?"

And then, setting us up brilliantly, Father Ahern bellowed out: "Of course, you can't make a lifetime promise!" A month before ordination, I almost slid off my seat onto the floor.

Poignantly, Father Ahern unpacked his meaty insight. He said that—regardless of our permanent commitment, be it marriage, **“until death do us part,”** or a religious vow to ordained ministry or religious life—each day we have to meet head-on our inner poverty. Each day we are thoroughly dependent on God’s grace. Sure, there are those moments when “forever” glides into the now, and the promise seems almost effortless, it is so graced with joy. But real life also has those arid, rough times when it seems too much. We either give up, “white-knuckle” it, or trust that God will be with us in that day. Yes, St. Patrick’s, like the chosen people having to trust *each* day that God would provide them manna from the heavens, we need to face our complete dependence on God—not only to keep the commitment, but to *live* it. If I do the deal on my own efforts alone, it will fizzle out painfully.

Jesus says as much in today’s Gospel, and the priest or deacon repeats the words right after two spouses make their promises for life: **“Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”** Yes, **“what God has joined together”**—each day, totally dependent on that grace, and totally needing it.

Two years ago, Pope Francis wrote a major teaching, entitled “On Love in the Family.” He meets head-on the pastoral reality of broken marriages. Pope Francis invites all of us “to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy. No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situations they find themselves” (#297). Pope Francis encourages us “to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (#37).

Yes, that Father Ahern taught well how each of us, daily, in our unique calling—we must depend on God’s grace and fully face our inner poverty.

“...Until death do us part”: We’re called to keep teaching it—commitments for life, be they marriage promises, or a promise to ordained ministry or religious life. Today’s Gospel puts it bluntly. Still, as Pope Francis invites us, *today—this* Sunday—we’re all called “to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy.”

Do I really want that? St. Patrick’s: Do you?

General Intercessions

October 7, 2018

27TH Sunday in Ordinary Time

For us, the church, that we may faithfully live the bond we have in Christ Jesus—a bond made in his blood; we pray to you, O Lord—

For Pope Francis, as his reflections on the Beatitudes lead our “small groups” here at St. Patrick’s; and, for his courage, wisdom and love at this time of crisis within the church; we pray to you, O Lord—

For married persons; for widows and widowers; for the separated or divorced; for single people; and for all who seek to make a home;

For all who suffer bigotry or persecution because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation; we pray to you, O Lord—

For the sick—those ill in mind or body: for their healing, and for their loving care from loved ones and the church; we pray to you, O Lord—

For the eternal rest of all who have died with hope, especially Margaret Anne Marshall; we pray to you, O Lord—

