

[Homily of Fr. Matthew Kelty, O.C.S.O. for the Solemnity of St. Bernard, Aug. 20, 1994 (Mk 5:13-16)]

Immortality Carried to Full Term

**All but blind in his chambered hole
Gropes for worms the four-clawed mole.
All but blind in the evening sky
The hooded bat Twirls softly by.
All but blind in the burning day
The barn-owl blunders on his way.
And blind as are these three to me
So, blind to Some One I must be.
— Walter de la Mare**

There is no immortality like holiness. It is immortality carried to full term. By virtue of being human, we are immortal. Through our faith in Christ that immortality loses any suggestion of whimsy and wonder and becomes instead a living reality, a vision of coming happiness.

When faith is weak and undeveloped, or not present at all, the desire for immortality is apt to express itself in ways that seem rather pathetic. People will want to be remembered. They will hope their name is passed on to children. They hope — many of them — to make a name in the world, to go down in history. To have streets, squares, parks, towns, buildings, trust funds, schools and colleges carrying their name seems to them a splendid achievement. The question rises, of course, in any reflecting mind: What possible good can come to James Duke for a university being named for him. If he enjoys likely reward for his goodness, his name identifying it has no significance. Yet the name on the marker over our head, on the stone above us, or even on an impressive monument, does give witness to the longing to live, to find in being remembered some assurance of it. Is Saint Bernard happier because a breed of dog is named for him? Everyone knows what a St. Bernard dog is. (*) How many know who he is? And does it matter if they know? Yes, it does matter. We can leave good after us that will nourish those who follow. Countless thousands do so in works of art, writing of every kind, bridges, public services, roads, highways and all that makes civilized life possible: heat, light, water, transport, communication. We live after us in our successes in medicine, music, learning. And so much more. This is an immortality. And it is obviously good.

But true immortality is eternal life with God. Next to that, being remembered some way on earth is modest indeed. And for all that, being remembered does nothing for those who are remembered. Is Diesel better off because every diesel engine is named for him?

Holiness moves the whole consideration onto another level. For through holiness we become a specific participant in the community of saints. In prayer, in grace, I can reach them, they can reach me, in Christ. This community of love of the saints in Heaven, the faithful on earth and the suffering in Purgatory is a true communion in love. Here remembering and being remembered is not idle or meaningless. It is love, and love is always dynamic.

God is remembered in all He left behind in creation and in sustaining that creation. We read God everywhere and in everything. If we do not, then we are blind indeed — the same blindness that afflicts those who fancy that the works they leave after them assure their immortality. They do nothing of the sort. We do not need to make ourselves immortal. We already are.

We need but acknowledge it. And the acknowledgment is an act of faith and one works then to attest to that immortality, as the universe does God. But God is immortal without His works, and so are we.

As human, as Christian, as monk, we give witness by faith to human immortality. And we make explicit what is often implicit, or implied. We make certain what is often nebulous. And this in the face of a materialist world of thin faith, or no faith at all. We do so not in condemnation, but in mercy, in compassion, in intercession.

We remember St. Bernard as an historic figure who was of great significance and still is. He is among the immortals. Further, he left a body of writing and a tradition in his religious Order which immortalizes him in yet another way. He lives on and is an influence in a world he left 900 years ago. But most of all he is immortal by holiness and as a saint we are in communion with, and he with us: this is more than mere remembering. This is love which is as real as the love of God because it is love rooted in God. A work of grace and a bonding union which is forever. We are not all but blind moles or hooded bats or barn-owls, but immortals destined for the Kingdom of God through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Actually, the famous St. Bernard dog gets its name from the Hospice of St. Bernard of Menthon (died 1081?), in the Swiss Alps.

Here's a JOYFUL website: http://www.castlemountains.net/flashmar/A_Cup_Of_Joy.swf

- - - - -
WHO STARTED CHRISTMAS

This morning I heard a story on the radio of a woman who was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and everything else imaginable. And after hours of hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those many shelves, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids.

She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season time of the year. Overwhelming pressure to go to every party, every housewarming, taste all the holiday food and treats, getting that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list, making sure we don't forget anyone on our card list, and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card.

Finally the elevator doors opened and there was already a crowd in the car. She pushed her way into the car and dragged her two kids in with her and all the bags of stuff. When the doors closed she couldn't take it anymore and stated, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot."

From the back of the car everyone heard a quiet calm voice respond, "Don't worry we already crucified him."

For the rest of the trip down, the elevator was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. Don't forget this year to keep the One who started this whole Christmas thing in your every thought, deed, purchase, and word. If we all did it, just think of how different this whole world would be.

- - - - -

If you put a buzzard in a pen six or eight feet square and entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of his ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner. The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of ten or twelve feet. Without space to run, as is his habit, he will not even attempt to fly, but will remain a prisoner for life in a small jail with no top.

The ordinary bat that flies around at night, a remarkable nimble creature in the air, cannot take off from a level place. If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly and, no doubt, painfully, until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it takes off alike a flash.

A Bumblebee, if dropped into an open tumbler will be there until it dies unless it is taken out. It never sees the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides near the bottom. It will seek a way where none exists, until it completely destroys itself.

In many ways, there are lots of people like the buzzard, the bat and the bee. They are struggling about with all their problems and frustrations, not realizing that the answer is right there above them.

'Enough is Enough': Theologian Joseph Hough On Why the Time for a Non-Destructive, Civil Disobedience Campaign

Broadcast 10/24/03 by NOW with Bill Moyers

Bill Moyers talks to Joseph C. Hough on the intersection of politics and religion, and why he thinks it is the duty of Christians, Jews and Muslims to join to fight growing economic inequality, why he's critical of how some political pundits are using Christianity to justify their actions, and why he suspects that the time for a non-destructive, civil disobedience may be near.

MOYERS: You recently did a very radical thing. You called on the children of Abraham — Muslims, Christians and Jews — to engage in an act of refusal.

HOUGH: Well, my perception, Bill, is that there is a definite intentional move on the part of political leadership in this country. In the direction that I think is not at all compatible with the prophetic tradition in Islam, Christianity, or Judaism: ... the obligation on the part of people who believe in God to care for the least and the poorest. That central teaching, that sacred code, I think, is very well summed up in Proverbs: ... "Those who oppress the needy insult their maker." ... And I think that it would be a wonderful thing if we could stand together, these 3 great Abrahamic traditions, and say, "Look, we do not countenance this sort of thing. It is not only unfair, it is immoral on the basis of our religious traditions, and we believe it's an insult to God."

MOYERS: And it is what?

HOUGH: The growing gap between the rich and the poor which has become almost obscene by anybody's standards, and the stated intentional policy of bankrupting the government so that in the future there'll be no money for anything the federal government would decide to do.

MOYERS: We've all heard this from economists.

HOUGH: Yes.

MOYERS: And political pundits, and analysts, think-tank experts. But we're hearing this from the president of a seminary?

HOUGH: Yeah. You are. And the reason you are is because I think that it's not just a political pundit issue. It's not just a think tank issue. It is a deep and profound theological issue. And it has to do with whether we are faithful to the deepest convictions called for by our faith. Because the central teaching of Jesus is-announced when he says, from Isaiah 61, "God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, deliverance to the captives, freedom to the oppressed, and the year of Jubilee." And as you know, the year of Jubilee was the year when land reform was supposed to take place, debts were to be canceled, slaves freed. Jesus drew from that Jewish tradition, that Covenantal tradition, and the obligation to care for the needy. Jesus Christ was a Jew. To his soul, he was a Jew. By the time he was 11 years old, people were absolutely astounded how well he knew the Jewish tradition. He crafted his message in direct connection to the Jewish tradition, and it was no accident that Luke put Isaiah 61 in Jesus' mouth at Nazareth. "The spirit of God is upon me because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." If you go through the Gospel to Luke, the entire theme of Luke is this. It appears also in the Sermon on the Mount. It appears indirectly in the feeding of the five thousand or four thousand, whichever you want. It's reported four times in the Gospel, more than any other single event in the life of Jesus. In every case, and it also, in a way, it foreshadows the Eucharist. Because the Eucharistic meal was first a meal for the people who were the followers of Jesus. And if you look it Acts 3, you will see that those followers of Jesus saw to it that people who didn't have enough to eat could come to that table and get enough to eat. That was the radical model they put out there. Nobody likes to talk about that very much. But there it is. Right in the middle of Acts. And they continued to worship in the temple. This is a continuity with the best in the Jewish tradition, and it is also no accident that there's some strong similarities in the Koran. And that is why I think all of us in the Abrahamic traditions who share this conviction about care for the least fortunate should simply make some kind of public declaration that *enough is enough. We've gone far enough.* And it is not at all in the spirit of American democracy to generate inequality, and to contradict equal opportunity in our society. Those are not the norms we've lived by.

MOYERS: Again, I come back to the paradox, which is that these policies to which you are protesting, which you say are immoral-were enacted by a Congress and an Administration elected to a significant degree with the support of the religious right — Conservative Christians who got active in politics and saw that their candidates were elected, and they're seeing now the policies that they believe they elected those officials to carry out.

HOUGH: Well. That's true, Bill, but my Dad, as I told you, is a Baptist preacher. He was until he was 84. And there was a notorious drunk in town who when he got drunk, he really went after preachers. But he said he was born-again Christian. And one day, someone asked my father if he thought Brother Suggs was a born-again Christian. And my father said, "Only God knows that." But, you know, the Lord Jesus said, "By their fruits, you shall know them." And speaking as a humble fruit inspector of the Lord, I'd say that if this person is a Born Again Christian, there's a mixed signal somewhere." I feel the same way. If Tom Delay is acting out of his Born Again Christian convictions in pushing legislation that disadvantages the poor every time he opens his mouth, I'm not saying he's not a Born Again Christian, but as a the Lord's humble fruit inspector, it sure looks suspicious to me. And anybody who claims in the name of God they're gonna run over people of other nations, and just willy-nilly, by your own free will, reshape the world in your own image, and claim that you're acting on behalf of God, that sounds a lot like Caesar to me.

MOYERS: Can a secular democracy, in a pluralistic society, where there are many faiths, including people of no faith, can that democratic government be expected to represent the religious, prophetic imperatives of people like you?

HOUGH: Well, maybe so, maybe not, Bill. But I'm getting tired of people claiming they're carrying the banner of

my religious tradition when they're doing everything possible to undercut it. And that's what's happening in this country right now. The policies of this country are disadvantaging poor people every day of our lives and every single thing that passes the Congress these days is disadvantaging poor people more.

MOYERS: I don't think even conservatives dispute that the inequality is growing in this country. You somehow sense that inequality is more profoundly disruptive and dangerous than others.

HOUGH: I think some inequality in terms of economics is necessary. That doesn't alarm me a great deal. It is the obscene degree to which economic inequality has taken hold in America that I think is highly questionable. There is no justification under Heaven for some corporate executives to make 1,000 times as much as their average worker. Their contribution may be great. But it's no less than Peter Drucker, my colleague at Claremont for 25 years, said...

MOYERS: Management guru par excellence.

HOUGH: Management guru and certainly nobody's fuzzy headed liberal. Peter Drucker says, "This compromises the integrity of a corporate executive." Why? Because it does not accept, and it does not in any way acknowledge the incredible contributions of people who work at various levels, the various constituencies of a corporation to its well being. It is driven by other factors than acknowledgement of who contributes to the well being of the corporation. Now Bill, I'm not naive. Nobody believes that everybody can be exactly the same, get the same. But there's certain bare minimums, what Amartya Sen, my favorite development economist calls. A Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen calls the capability to function in society. And Sen says that no society can claim to be fair if there are substantial number of its citizens who are not receiving enough assistance or income to have the capability to function. Now, what does that mean? It means to buy food, to have a place to live, to have their children educated, to get reasonable health care and a job. And we want to ask the people of our traditions to join us is asking every single political leader we encounter, "What are you gonna do in order to help make this happen?" Let's make that the litmus test of whether or not we're gonna vote for a particular leader. It's not a partisan issue. I mean, my God, who in the world could possibly stand up and say, "I'm a Christian. I don't think we should really give much attention to the life of the poor." Some do. But I don't think it's a party line thing. I mean, I'd like for this debate to be carried on in such a way that we could, and here I'm talking about Abrahamic traditions. We could ask ourselves "What changes in the direction of this country are necessary if it really is gonna make a claim to be a democracy?" We're not asking it to be a theocracy. A democracy. That's what it's about. Politically, that's what it's about.

MOYERS: It's about?

HOUGH: It is about whether Democrats and Republicans who are sensitive to this move, where people who are sensitive to this move in our society politically, are able to get the will to say, "Enough is enough." I mean, let's stop this business, and let's look again and ask the question, "What will really make this a country that we can be proud of, and one that that pays attention to all the people, not just a few."

MOYERS: A recent Nobel Laureate has said that he thinks the time is coming for civil disobedience again. What do you think about that?

HOUGH: I think it may come to that. I think it may come to that - I really do. I don't know what form it's to take. It's got to be civil disobedience that is not destructive. One of the problems I have with some of the demonstrations against for example, the WTO and at Davos.

MOYERS: The World Trade Organization?

HOUGH: The World Trade Organization, and the Davos conferences. One of the problems I have with those is that some people seem just bent on destruction and violence. And I think Martin Luther King's exactly right. If you try to advance your cause with violence, you provoke violence, and the way the world is structured, if you try to promote your cause with violence, you're gonna lose. The only way to promote your cause is civil disobedience and the willingness to take the consequences for it. And I think we're just about there.

MOYERS: Joe Hough, thank you very much.

HOUGH: Thank you.

Joseph C. Hough, former dean of the Vanderbilt Divinity School, is currently President of the Faculty and William E. Dodge Professor of Social Ethics at the Union Theological Seminary. Hough graduated from Wake Forest University with a B.A. in 1955. He went on to receive the B.D. (1959), the M.A. (1964), and the Ph.D. (1965) from Yale University. Dr. Hough is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, Congregational. His teaching and research interests are in social ethics, theological education, the Church and ministry.

Public Affairs Television
www.commondreams.org/views03/1027-01.htm
© Public Affairs Television

http://www.pbs.org/now/transcript/transcript_hough.html

- - - - -

To a preacher who kept saying, "We must put God in our lives," the Master said, "He is already there. Our business is to recognize this."
--Daily Meditations from Anthony de Mello

God is singing and Creation is the melody. --David Palmer

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone. Therefore we are saved by love.
--Reinhold Niebur

The future will generate even more ambiguity and chaos than we face today. Learning how to raise our individual and collective resilience is not just a good idea - it is imperative.
-- Managing at the Speed of Change, Daryl R. Conner, (c)1995, Villard Books

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace. --Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 (NRSV)

- - - - -

A Homily of Fr. Matthew Kelty, O.C.S.O., for the 32nd Sunday of the Year (B), (Mk 12:38-44)

The Wine of Extravagance

Father Solanus Casey was a Capuchin. He was born in Detroit in 1870 and died there in 1957 at 86. He was ordained in 1904, but with a strict proviso: he was never to preach, never to hear confessions, never to teach. He was what was called a "Mass priest." He served as porter in a New York friary for 20 years, served 30 years as porter in a friary in Detroit. He was richly endowed by the Holy Spirit, he could read souls, though intellectually he was poor. There were 10,000 people at his funeral. He is to be canonized as a true man of God. He gave all he

had.

There are about 50,000 priests in this country and about 100,000 Sisters. We Cistercians of this branch number about 500 here: 400 monks, 100 nuns. But we give what we have. Even our dead are few. We have some 200 in our graveyard. To be sure, many went onto daughter-houses. But the number is modest. Nazareth has maybe 2,000, only a few decades older. Yet, however few ours be, they gave all.

Like the woman in the Gospel today. Jesus does not call it the widow's mite. We do. He praised her because she gave all. In a subsistence community, one can manage with little cash. And it was little she had. She gave it to the Church, all of it.

It was the wealthy who gave the mite. We should call the story: the rich men's mite. To be sure, they were generous. They had means and they shared. Praiseworthy enough. But they could not hold a candle to what the widow did. She was munificent on a shoe-string.

Then why make comparisons? They can be odious. Margaret Truman could sing, had a pleasant voice, was trained. But in comparison with quality professionals, she did not make it. But she gave what she had.

So why did Christ compare, then? Probably because that's what the disciples were doing. They perhaps smiled or made disparaging remarks about the widow and her gift. Christ frequently took up passing comments, showing that even by their own standards the disciples did not make sense. "Why choose the best seat? You may be asked to move lower. Even by your own standards you lack insight." "No one becomes honorable by playing the part, looking important, being prominent. That is no route to honor. Even by your own logic, you do not pass." It's the way of the world, though. Big people drive big cars.

And we are called to be big. Not in the way of the world, but in the way of the widow -- extravagant. In the way of the widow gathering sticks, bringing water to Elijah, and then bread -- though she uses this last of what little she has, for him. Extravagant woman. Like the poor Jesus Who stripped Himself of glory to become poor for our sake that He might lead us to glory and eternal riches in Him. **Extravagant.**

So the call is to extravagance, not prudence. Munificence, not shrewd calculation. We can do it once in a while. And doing it once in a while makes it possible to do it once and for all when we make a leap of faith and accept Jesus wholly, and His Church -- His Spouse, His Bride, His Body. An extravagance we never regret and never renege on. This and this alone makes life worth living. The two widows were on to something. One hopes we are. And when we are, there is no hiding it. If you're stingy, you never got the message. No one who has drunk the wine of extravagance will ever stoop to stinginess on anything. Total gift brings total freedom. Amen.

* * * * *

A Homily of Fr. Matthew Kelty, O.C.S.O. for the 1st Sunday of the Lent (C), 1995: Lk 4:1-13

Acting Out Vicarious Guilt

Many years ago, so many, in fact, that it seems in a previous incarnation, I was called home from a mission assignment in the Pacific to do some other work. And I returned by way of Europe -- as close that way as the other -- and so got a look at a few other countries. I do not remember much, but I do remember this Europe was clean, some lands immaculate. I thought of that last week when I went to see two doctors, one in Lebanon, one in Campbellsville, named fittingly enough for a monk's care: Kirk and Angel. And the roads over one way and back another were unsightly with litter, lots of litter, scattered along the wayside. Why do Americans do this? They did not bring it with them from Europe and most of them are from Europe ultimately. Why do they do it here? Foreign visitors are appalled. It is an ugly trait, unsightly, selfish, arrogant, thoughtless. And despite years of effort to eradicate this vice, small progress has been made. Why do they dump their trash in my front yard? They don't do it at home. Americans have a lot of good qualities. This is not one of them. It is disgraceful. People otherwise decent enough open the window, throw out the debris, and move on down the road.

So I was thinking about this, a friend and I. What is going on here? I suggest it is rooted in guilt.

Americans are a favored people. They live in one of the richest, best developed, most beautiful countries in the world. Who would argue with that? Further, they are daily exposed to how the rest of the world lives, and that in vivid and dramatic terms. It is absurd to suggest that has no impact. Famine, disease, poverty, ignorance, tyranny, oppression are common. The lot of most.

And we live in Paradise. Why? What is so special about us? Nothing really. Just happenstance, Providence, fortune, good luck.

A person can feel guilty about it in some unconscious way. And we know too, in our hearts, that we are not as deserving as we'd like to think. So we act out guilt. We do something nasty. And everyone knows throwing your trash on the roadside is nasty. And that makes you feel better. I'm not special. I am just a sinner and a slob in paradise.

But guilt is not resolved by acting out evil. When a child gives in to impulse and instead of being its usual self,

does something mean, we correct the child. That's not how you deal with evil impulse. You confess it. You acknowledge it. You ask mercy and forgiveness. But you do not act on it. Otherwise we simply confirm ourselves in evil.

Granted that litter is not a major moral problem, it is a highly significant one. And one worth considering during Lent.

And if confession is extraordinarily healthy for moral growth, the Eucharist is even more so. For in the Eucharist we are confronted with the fruit of evil.

The Mass is no mere ritual re-enactment of the Passion and Death of the Lord. Ritual re-enactment it is, but it is also reality. It is the Death of the Lord.

That's why the head is a priest, and why he stands at an altar. He is offering a sacrifice as Christ. And this Christ is put to death. By sinners. And we are sinners. So in the truest sense we witness the consequence of our evil. Our evil put the Son of God to death.

And His death becomes a merciful pardon and healing. We are forgiven by the Lord we crucified and invited to His table to be united to Him in His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.

And then bidden go home and live in love. Now no need to act out the evil in us. We have already done so. And in His merciful grace can live in love.

Here is the healing of guilt. We are sinners healed by the mercy of God. Now there is no need to come to terms with guilt by acting on it. We both resist evil and receive pardon. Guilt is overwhelmed by the mercy of God.

In many ways, large and small, serious and trifling, we may reveal a guilt-ridden heart. Acting out is not the answer. Pardon is the answer. Pardon through confession and God's mercy. Pardon through the Passion in which the very death we inflicted on the Lord becomes our salvation.

These are deep truths. They are worth reflecting on these 40 days.

[cf <http://www.monks.org/homilies.html> for other homilies + other things from Gethsemani]

- - - - -
A PRAYER FOR THOSE GROWING OLD

Lord, You know that I am growing older.

Keep me from becoming talkative & possessed with the idea I must express myself on every subject.

Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs.

Keep me from the recital of endless detail.

Give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips when I am inclined to tell of my aches and pains.

They are increasing with the years and my love to speak of them grows sweeter as time goes by. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong.

Make me thoughtful but not nosey; helpful but not bossy.

With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it does seem a pity not to use it all.

But You know, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

I place myself in Your hand. Amen.