

Homily for January 31, 1999  
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12

## *Our faith makes fools of us.*

Years ago I worked on a farm in Piqua, Ohio. A sizeable part of my work was keeping the irrigation ditches clear since we farmed some three hundred acres. Irrigation ditches tended to be a lot like people. It seems as if some of them don't like what they're supposed to like - in this case, water. They would rather catch and grab hold of more concrete stuff like branches and sticks. But when the irrigation ditch did that, grabbing and clinging to those "things," it was no longer fulfilling its intended function. The ditch had to keep itself empty of sediment, rocks or anything else that would slow the flow of the water. The ditch had to remain "poor" if it was to accomplish what it was there for. If it became greedy or acquisitive of those non-essential things, non-essential things it could hang on to, it could no longer drain the land.

We Christians can draw a lesson from the drainage ditch. We're not meant to be storehouses of God's blessings but channels, conduits, vehicles for transference and transformation. And not only each of us individually; our churches and congregations and parishes are not meant to be storehouses, but channels.

Yes, there are folks, not all of them rich, who believe in the rising of the Dow Jones and not in the rising of Jesus, crucified and risen for them. There are many who build bigger barns for their surplus...like the character in the *New Yorker* magazine cartoon some years ago showing people shaking hands with a priest at the door of a church after a service. An obviously prosperous but scowling businessman is telling the pastor, "And I say the meek will not inherit the earth." No, our Christian faith tends to make us look foolish especially with advice like that of St. Ambrose, who in the fifth century said that the place to store our surplus is in the mouths of the poor. We are to let it flow through us. So it is not too hard to understand that a great deal of wealth may pass through a channel if that channel itself is "poor," if the cares of the world and the lure of wealth do not clog it. And it is not too hard to understand that people in poverty may be so obsessed, so burdened, by the cares of the world and the lure of wealth that nothing can get through their channel either.

Those who are broken-hearted, dispirited, brutalized by power or life, unable to lift head or heart – perhaps this is the greatest poverty of all – to have the spirit destroyed by mindless work or grinding poverty or political oppression. Both the rich and the poor are addressed by today's readings.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, Jesus is introducing us to his upside-down world where the first shall be last, the least will be the greatest, and the master will be the servant of all. Jesus is calling us into the inverted society, calling us to be fools – at least that is what the world thinks us to be.

So how do we invite the invasion of God...invite God to visit, to flow through us in our wealth and in our poverty? It's simple really...invite the Lord to come into our hearts and then stand back. -A simple two step process: recognize and accept Christ as the source of life and our center and let the Lord turn the upside-down and the right-side up. Then, much to our surprise, we shall discover that we spontaneously give thanks and praise and the channel of our lives so often cluttered becomes amazingly clean and clear and free.

Receiving Holy Communion and accepting one another are great models for how God deals with us: we earn nothing – but merely open our mouths and hands and our minds and God does the rest.

A visitor to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D. C., tells one story that is haunting. Survivors of the Holocaust were asked to share what they remembered about the day of liberation. One woman told how she was asked by a captain of the liberation army if he could see their sleeping quarters. As they approached the barracks the captain opened the door for her. That's what she remembered of the day of liberation...a simple act of human kindness or mere courtesy after years of brutality. "He opened the door for me," she

said. And that is the experience we have in Jesus Christ as our faith makes fools of us.

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fools of us.**