

Homily for October 1, 2006
26th Sunday of the Year (B)

By Father Charles Bowes

Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14
James 5:1-6

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

To be a life-giver – that’s what we share with God our Father.

As a child I remember seeing a movie entitled, “Goodbye Mr. Chips.” It was about a man who taught in an English boarding school – how he, a rather shy fellow, met a woman and proposed marriage, but she died before they married.

He never did marry, but spent the rest of his life teaching. The end of the film shows Mr. Chips, an old man now, on his deathbed. A friend, thinking he was out of earshot, observes, “What a pity old Chippers never had any children of his own.” But Mr. Chips whispers in his failing voice, “Oh, but I do have children – thousands of them,” and the film, as only a film can, shows in rapid succession faces of all those he had taught in the course of some 60 years. He gave life, that old teacher did, just as surely as any parent.

Today on this Respect Life Sunday we’re invited to reflect on what it means to be a life-giver. Jesus became that for his disciples. Today’s Gospel gives us a look at how Jesus did this for his followers. He has taught his apostles well, and in this story, he sent them on a mission to apply the teachings to the communities around them. When they come back, they give him a rather unusual response to the success of their mission.

Rather than telling him how well they did, they report to him that they saw someone outside of their group “driving out demons in your name.”

I believe that if I had been there, I may have done something similar. Maybe you would too. Why? Because I think most of us have an inherent tendency to want to be a part of a select group. Someone who hasn’t gone through what we have, doesn’t share the same values – I tend to be suspicious of, cautious around.

Like most sins, it feels so good...that feeling of pride that convinces you that you’ve staked your claim on the right side of the divide. Drawing a line is serious business. In post 9/11 America, we’re tragically aware of what happens when lines are drawn in hatred and fear. We recently commemorated the 5th anniversary of that terrible day. I’m sure you watched some programs and read some articles reflecting on it.

The most striking article that I heard about was written by Peggy Noonan. The title of her article was, “I Just Called to Say I Love You,” and was reprinted from the *Wall Street Journal*. Her words focused not on the images of destruction from that day, but on the words of love and life.

She writes: “I think too about the sounds that came from within the buildings and within the planes – the phone calls and messages left on answering

machines, all the last things said to whoever was home and picked up the phone. They awe me, those messages.”

Thirty-one-year-old Melissa Harrington, a California-based trade consultant attending a meeting in the Towers, called her father to say she loved him. Minutes later she left a message on the answering machine as her new husband slept in their San Francisco home: “Sean, it’s me. I just wanted to let you know that I loved you.”

Captain Walter Hynes of the New York Fire Department dialed home and left this message: “I don’t know if we’ll make it out. I want you to know that I love you and I love the kids.”

Something terrible had happened, Noonan goes on to say. Time was short, life was reduced to its essentials. She reminds her readers that there is no record of anyone calling to say, “I never liked you,” or “You hurt my feelings.” Amazingly, or not, there is no record of anyone damning the terrorists or saying, “I hate them.” Life and death are a reality in our world.

Giving life and taking life are our choice. But so is love. And love is of God. On this Respect Life Sunday, we celebrate and pray for the Church’s respect and care for all life, from conception to natural death. Material is in the back of Church for further reading.

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