

This is a rich Gospel in which to explore. At face value it is about status and self-worth. F. Scott Fitzgerald's American classic, *The Great Gatsby*, which I sometime explore with my students reveals that status seeking is a part of American society.

America saw itself as being a classless society, proud that it was not like Europe and its stratified societies. However, Fitzgerald, in his powerful novel, reveals that America has created its own system of class. Only in America, status is not gained by property or by family, but by money. It is now money that separates us in America, and we see that still reflected in the political campaigns of our own time.

Jay Gatsby, looking across the water at the green light on the dock of the rich, was shut out of that society because he was poor. He wanted so much to be a part of their elegant parties. He wanted that more than anything else in the world and, in many ways, so do we.

I remember back in 1995, Pope John Paul II came to NY/NJ area. He held Mass at several locations in New York, in Newark and at Giants Stadium; some of you were probably at the Stadium Mass. And much like Pope Francis' visit to Philadelphia, there were crowds upon crowds wanting to get a glimpse of the pope. One of the services was the Rosary in St.

Patrick's Cathedral, for an invited, ticked audience. My friend who was and still is a deacon there had an extra ticket. He called and asked me if I wanted to use it; it was a "standing only" ticket. I said yes.

So I took a bus ride on a Saturday morning to Port Authority with a ticket to the Cathedral in my pocket. There were special instructions on how to get through the myriad of security check points, which started about six blocks before the cathedral. As I made my way through the check points each double checking my ticket, I came to Park Avenue and 51st the second to last check point. It was there I first saw the pope. Police cars came ripping up Park Avenue with sirens blaring. They pulled over suddenly; brakes screeching stopping at all four corners of the intersection; Loud speakers ordered everyone to "stay where you are." There were a few of us in the security line and there were those out for a stroll. We all wondered what this was all about. This was before 9/11 and the security issues of today. When all of a sudden in the distance came the Pope in his Pope Mobil traveling up Park Avenue on his way to the Cathedral to say the Rosary after saying Mass at Central Park. As he passed, he blessed the few people on the street. The crowds were expecting him to come up 5th Avenue and there they gathered. After he passed us, I made my way

through each check point feeling more and more privileged that only invited guests were permitted to move on, and I was one.

I made my way through the remaining check points and ended up inside the Cathedral. I could not believe it. I showed an usher my ticket marked, "Standing." I asked where I should stand. He said, "Oh you can stand anywhere." I ended up a few feet from the altar standing on a marble heating cover. I had one of the best seats in the house.

The Pope made his way down the center aisle to applause. He walked up onto the altar and greeted the crowd. There was the Vice President of the US, the mayor of NY and an A list of celebrities salted in the crowd. The pope, knelt and said the Rosary; it was moving.

Afterwards, the Pope left for the Vatican, and I got back on the bus at Port Authority. I wanted to tell everyone at the bus station: "do you know where I am coming from?" "Do you know who I just saw?" Do you know who blessed my Rosary Beads?" But no one cared as I was not changed in anyway. Some were running for their own busses, and others were panhandling waiting for more busses to come in; the world had not changed even though the Pope was only a few blocks away.

After I settled down about the whole experience, I reflected about my favorite points. You know - it was not in the cathedral near the Pope, but out on Park Ave with everybody else when the Pope came by. It was all of us, strangers, standing on the street together greeting a world leader, almost alone; no special ticket needed. That's is where it all connected for me and why I thought of this Gospel.

Those with tickets to the Cathedral were no worthier than those on the streets, although I suspect many thought they were, me included. Many are now dead, equal in the eyes of God.

It is not where you are seated at the table ultimately counts, it is your faith alone; Jesus has said as much. However, it still seems to be the hardest lesson for all of us to learn.

So if you have box tickets to the Yankees – I will take them – but I don't really want them.