

Killing Self-Interest

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

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By nature, we almost always act out of self-interest. Even those among us who are so giving probably do so out of an unspoken expectation of reciprocation. It is just part of human nature to be short-sighted. We keep going back to what's best for us.

In today's Gospel from *Luke*, Jesus uses very strong language about hating father, mother, wife, children, brother, sisters, possessions, and even our own life. While we need to be very careful not to see Jesus as hateful, what he is trying to do is kill our self-interest. Jesus calls us beyond doing things that will just benefit us or our own immediate family. Like a builder wishing to construct a tower or a king preparing for a great battle, we need to overcome our self-interest so that we can plan ahead and look well into the future. If we don't plan for the future, like in the Gospel, onlookers will look at us and laugh.

There is a Native American concept that is said to have originated with the Iroquois people called the 'seventh generation stewardship.' What this means is that any time the elders have to make a decision, they ask themselves how this decision will effect their people seven generations from now. The reasoning is to make sure they are not making choices out of self-interest, but about what is best for the future. They are able to see the bigger picture, put their own wants and desires aside, face reality, and do what's best for their children's children. We would do well to start thinking in those terms as Americans, Catholics, and parishioners at St. Matthias. What's best for the people seven generations from now.

Fr. Peter Daly, a columnist who writes in *National Catholic Reporter*, is beginning a series on problems with the priesthood. He is very critical and thinks that the priesthood needs a radical reform. Yet, in his first installment this past week, he wrote that before he is going to say anything negative, he wants to make one thing clear: he loves the priesthood. He listed a whole series of things that he loves about it. The one that I agree with personally is when he writes, “being a priest means I get to think about the big questions. I get to ask the transcendent questions about goodness, truth, suffering and salvation. Priests can focus on the big human questions if they want to.” During my training for the priesthood and now as a priest, I have learned to think not only in terms of days and weeks, but in terms of years, decades, and centuries. We need more people in our world to start seeing the bigger picture.

Jesus breaks our self-interest so that we can better plan for the future.

Am I so caught up in my own life that I fail to see what’s best for the future of humanity?

Breaking our self-interest so that we can plan for the future can be scary. We can probably relate to the words from our First Reading from the *Book of Wisdom*: “for the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans.” Yet, we know that God is always present, “for in every age, O Lord, you have been (and will be!) our refuge.”