

**Hope does not disappoint: Our finances & our future  
All Souls (A), Nov. 2, 2014**

**Readings:**

Wisdom 3:1–9; Psalm 23:1–6; Romans 5:5–11; John 6:37–40  
Father William C. Graham | St. Michael's in Duluth

The Apostle Paul promises us: “Hope does not disappoint, / because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts / through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” What about that hope? And what about disappointment?

Our true hope, and what we hope for, is made evident in the prayers for today, The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, or All Souls Day, on which we remember and pray for all of those who have gone before us in death. In the Prayer over the Offerings, we ask that God look favorably on his departed servants, that they “may be taken into glory” with Christ. This is our sure and best hope: for them, and for each and all of us.

One of the best spins I have heard on this Christian truth was from old Tom Daugherty, whom we buried from the Cathedral Parish on Friday. He would often ask us priests on the limo ride back to church from cemetery, “You’ve never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul, have you, Father?” I never have; and I checked on Friday; Tom did not have a u-Haul either.

We sometimes hear evangelical Christians preach a prosperity gospel, suggesting that God will bless the faithful with money and health. This is not a Catholic approach; we do not believe that God works in that way; ours is not that kind of a feel-good religion. Some folks think they might prefer that prosperity approach; many folks who want a prosperity gospel leave Catholicism and experiment with other communities. We should be clear, though: the prosperity gospel is not real Christianity, but rather a misunderstanding of Christianity.

Some others will insist that the gospel is not about belief or praise or informed decision-making. Instead, they insist that Christianity is about feelings. They assert that Christianity should make you feel good before

or even in place of thinking. One best selling evangelical Christian author maintains that “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.” Yeah. Well. About that: If your picture is on God’s refrigerator, it is because you are part of the people of God, a member of the Body of Christ, part of the Church of which we sing in the hymn, “For All the Saints.” The hymn envisions: “O blest communion, fellowship divine! / we feebly struggle, they in glory shine; / all are one in thee, for all are thine. / Alleluia, Alleluia!”

In the 18th century, a wave of emotionalism swept across America, suggesting that people should “feel right,” as Harriet Beecher Stowe put it when writing about enslaved African Americans in sentimental situations with Little Eva and Uncle Tom. The approach of such stories was to move the heart, not convince the head. The approach was simple: Christianity could make you better, a better man or woman or child of God. Norman Vincent Peale did that in *The Power of Positive Thinking*, as did Robert Schuller in his book, *The Be Happy Attitudes*.

But Catholicism is not about inspirational self-help. Catholicism is not about emotion, psychology, or an individualistic or prosperity gospel. Catholicism insists that it is not just your picture, or those of your family and friends, on God’s refrigerator. Catholicism is not about telling individuals how important they are to God. Popular culture wants you to believe that you are the most important person ever, but that brand of evangelicalism is foreign to us Catholics, and must remain foreign to us.<sup>1</sup>

An honest approach to true Catholicism is lots and lots of demanding work; it insists that we reform our hearts and minds and attitudes; that we conform our lives to the gospel, and our hearts to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Some folks find this WAY too much work. They wander off, and then insist that they are spiritual but not religious. There are many in our own age who are fond of telling us, “I am SBNR (spiritual but not religious).” They tempt us to reduce the whole Christian enterprise to a simple philosophy, “Jesus was nice. So I should be nice, too.” This approach is not the Church’s philosophy or practice. Clearly, for the

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<sup>1</sup> See “Are the Osteens evangelical outliers?” by Todd M. Brennenman, <http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2014-10/are-osteens-evangelical-outliers>

faithful, our religion and our spirituality are of the same fabric. And nice is not good enough.<sup>2</sup>

The Way, who is Jesus, is not a solitary path, nor a private thoroughfare on which my individual spirituality guides me until I come to the reward prepared for me in a distant time and place. In short, it is not all about me. Instead, it is a corporate enterprise. We come together as the Body of Christ; individually, we are members of that Body. I am never alone on the Jesus Way. Our spirituality is not a private matter or a solitary path. Rather, the Way runs through and includes the human community, even and especially those we might not first choose to include, the oppressed, marginalized and those who are impoverished in any way. We care first for the distressed because Jesus cared first for them. We who seek to follow the Way must do as he has done.

So, life in a parish is a principal focus of Catholicism. In fact, our National Conference of Catholic Bishops tells us: “The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church. Parishes are the place where God's people meet Jesus in word and sacrament and come in touch with the source of the Church's life.”<sup>3</sup> If parishes are to do what they are obliged and called to do, they need, we need, the generous support of all members, each contributing, time, talent and treasure.

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists 5 precepts. Number 5 is “To contribute to the support of the Church.” This has been a concern and an issue and an obligation in every age and place. In fact, the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563, spoke authoritatively that “Tithes to be paid in full: those withholding, or hindering, the payment thereof are to be excommunicated.” Let's be clear, we are not talking here,

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<sup>2</sup> See “SBNR” in **100 Days Closer to Christ** by William C. Graham:  
<http://www.litpress.org/Products/E3598/100-days-closer-to-christ.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish*, a statement of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops:  
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/communities-of-salt-and-light-reflections-on-the-social-mission-of-the-parish.cfm>

today, about excommunication, but rather about the serious nature of our common obligations. Trent tells us that “the payment of tithes is due to God; and they who refuse to pay them, or hinder those who give them, usurp the property of another.”<sup>4</sup>

Much has changed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the obligation to support the Church and the Church’s good works has not changed and will not change. So, we have begun here at St. Michael’s what will clearly be a two-year process of discussing and seeking to fund our priorities, our direction, our hopefulness. As the discussion continues, we recognize that many of our members, both young and old, are very generous; many do all that they can to assist in the Church’s work. Some of the rest of us could do more. I am one of the ones who could do more.

I am not asking people on fixed incomes to miss meals to increase their offerings. I am not asking those who are unemployed or underemployed to give what they do not have. I am not asking those who are uncomfortable or pinched to stretch in impossible ways.

I am asking that those who are comfortable make themselves a bit less comfortable. If you are or your family is fortunate enough to feel comfortable, please consider afflicting yourself a bit, make yourselves a bit less comfortable: consider increasing your gift by 10 or even 25 percent.

If we are to remain a community of faith, of action, and of hope, the place where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth, then: we will have to stretch ourselves a bit, make of ourselves more generous people, people whose hearts are more clearly conformed to the heart of Jesus.

If we do faithfully all that we are called to do, then we will be signed up for the Christian jubilee, our names will be written on the roll. We’ll be changed when the Lord has lifted us; we want to be ready when Jesus comes:

“Sign me up for the Christian jubilee,

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<sup>4</sup> Session 25, Chapter 12: <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch25.htm>

Write my name on the roll.  
I've been changed, since the Lord has lifted me,  
I wanna be ready when Jesus comes,  
I wanna be ready when Jesus comes.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hymnary.org/hymn/AAHH2001/192>

## **Intercessions:**

That the Hope, which does not disappoint, animate all the Church in love of God, we pray:

That we may have a clearer vision of our blest communion, and divine fellowship; that we who struggle may come one day to the shining glory of the angels and the saints, we pray:

For an honest approach to true Catholicism; that we reform our hearts and minds and attitudes; that we conform our lives to the gospel, and our hearts to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we pray:

That we care first for the distressed with a keen understanding that Jesus cared first for them; that we who seek to follow the Way may do as he has done, we pray:

For an increased understanding that our parish is where the Church lives; that we are a community of faith, of action, and of hope; that our parish be a place where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth, we pray:

That each of us do what we are obliged and called to do; that our parish be blessed with the generous support of all our members, each contributing, time, talent and treasure, we pray:

That we who are comfortable might make ourselves a bit less comfortable; that those who are not so fortunate might receive what they truly need, we pray:

May all of our beloved dead may see the face of God, and join in an endless song of praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever: **AMEN!**