

This homily was in the back of my mind last weekend when I was in Chicago working on my dissertation. (Yes, it will be finished soon—the dissertation and the homily!!) After a day of reading, outlining, writing, deleting and doing it again, I went down to the Loop to watch a taping of one my favorite NPR shows, “Wait, Wait...Don’t Tell Me!” I got on the Blue Line near O’Hare and headed down town.

You see one of everything on the trains in Chicago; more so, when you go from O’Hare to the Loop downtown. Young men and women with piercings of various sizes and tattoos of various designs and hues heading down to the clubs (or whatever), Canadian tourists with their children heading down to the theatre district to see “Wicked,” homeless people trying to escape the weather and to panhandle among the passengers...Boomers, Gen X-ers, Millennials, and whatever we’ll eventually call the new generation—pretty much one of everything.

I got to the theatre where they tape the show and found myself in the midst of a typical NPR crowd—white, middle-class, middle-age, middle income people into cerebral humor.

I walked around downtown for a while after the show and found myself among a lot of homeless people—mostly people of color, middle aged and older—literally living from hand to mouth.

After the train ride home, I ended up at the Steak-N-Shake across from my hotel among the cooks and servers—immigrants from Latin countries, Eastern Europe, and the Near East.

In part, I guess, because I was thinking of this. In part, because it’s just a good question, I found myself asking throughout the evening how does my life affect the worlds in which these people live. (I know that my involvement in education—as a teacher—directly and indirectly affects the world. Teaching is an act of Social Justice. Teaching people to think and to look at the world with a critical eye and gospel perspective changes the world. That’s another homily!)

What of my life as a religious in the Church affects the worlds I described above...prayer—communal and individual; my vows, especially the Marianist Stability; the Rule’s call to see community as means to live and build the Kingdom; the gospel mandate to share what I have been given as gift; the social teaching demanding that I transform the world, the challenge of Mary to “do whatever he tells [me]!”

I certainly do not wish to hold myself up as a model of religious life. I hesitate but I will put myself forth as part of juxtaposition, a contrast, that might illuminate this evenings’ Scripture.

No one will be shocked if I describe myself as “busy.” Enough said! Juxtapose what you know of my life with the life of a Carthusian monk as portrayed in the film “Into The Great Silence.” (If you have not seen it. I highly recommend it. Just don’t expect “The Nun’s Story.”) The film provides a picture of *grace*. With little dialog and a lot of fascinating photography. The film maker captures the silence and the disposition required to, as God does, “hear the cry of the poor.”

I won’t be subtle here. As we hear the scripture of the day, I like us to see in the juxtaposition of the Carthusian and me (any of us) the invitation into *the great silence*. As religious, we are called in the Church to act as Jesus to respond to the needs of our Brothers and Sisters. With the humility of the tax collector, we must stand before God—Carthusian, Marianist, Benedictine, Jesuit—supported and nourish by Grace that we

---

have no reason to expect and struggle to understand. Our lives are about transformation—of self, others, and the world. Our lives are about surrendering to God and allowing God’s grace to fill our lives. Our lives as religious in the Church bring us to *The Great Silence* where experience God wherever we find ourselves.

The paradox of our lives, often forgotten, is that we as Marianists—so called active religious—and, as an example, the Carthusians—so called contemplative religious share the same ultimate goal: unity with God. We go about it in very different ways. I run around South Texas giving workshops or teach or research or write...I believe each of these activities helps me hear the cries of people around me and to build the kingdom. They are part of how I enter the *great silence*. Carthusians and other contemplatives enter the *great silence* very differently from me. We may be under the illusion they only make fudge, or jelly, or farm. If you’re familiar with any monastery, they are usually involved in the local community somehow. To keep the dynamic parallel, I spend time with the Benedictines or the Trappists in Winnipeg most summers.

Paul, talking about the finish of his race, lived the *great silence* in his preaching and teaching, in his imprisonment, in his journey...in his martyrdom. He found God in every experience of his life.

We enter the *great silence* as we encounter God and as we try to be like God in hearing the supplications of those whom we encounter—Brothers and Sisters in community, those with whom and for whom we minister, those we meet or ignore on the streets...

Sirach reminds us that God hears the prayers of those in need—so should we! We can only those in the *great silence!*

Let’s get back to Chicago. I am not sure I can answer the question about my life and its relationship to the worlds of Chicago. I know it’s in the *great silence* that I can at least ask the question and hear the cries of others. Only in the *great silence* can we begin to answer that question. As we pray, explore, and plan what we can do to foster vocations, I think God through the Scriptures today invites to listen, to engage, and to act in such a way that people we meet on the trains or on the streets or the neighborhood Steak-n-Shake share in our prayers, works, and lives. Just to beat the metaphor one more time, we must find ways to invite them to join us in the *great silence*. We need to have the humility of the tax collector to see that we are together with the people whom we encounter.