

22nd Sunday, Ordinary Time C, August 29, 2010

When I first read today's gospel I couldn't help but think of a former parishioner of ours, a lady by the name of Maggie McKenna. How many of you remember Maggie? If you're as old as I am you might remember a regular Readers' Digest feature called "The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met." Well, if I had to choose a "most unforgettable character," that person might well be Maggie McKenna. I told Maggie once that once that she was a character, and she just laughed and laughed, because you see, she knew she was a character, and a rather unpredictable one at that. I don't have time to regale you with Maggie stories, but I do want to tell you why today's gospel reminded me of her.

You see, every once in a while, Maggie would host a dinner at her house, in some ways like the dinner in our gospel today (and in some ways different). I had the memorable experience of being there for a few of those dinners. You never knew what you were going to eat, or when, except that you could be sure it wasn't going to be right away. I know that one time I even arrived and found out I was supposed to cook! That's a true story; Maggie had a whole platter of steaks -- I don't know where or how she got them, because she didn't have much money -- but I wound up cooking them all on a small grill just outside the back door. And there would usually be anywhere from 15 to 30 people at her dinners, a fair number of them parishioners. Sadly, I know she often invited parishioners who did not come, but then ... Maggie was a bit of a character, as I said.

But what always intrigued me was that at Maggie's dinners there would also be other invited guests that Maggie had just met somewhere. You see, Maggie was not one to care about class. Once I met a street musician at one of her parties...once, a clerk from a used book store...once, a handicapped person in a wheelchair. Often people were a bit oddly dressed. It was clear that Maggie made friends in unusual places. We would all introduce ourselves, socialize, enjoy our meal, and afterwards Maggie always wanted her guests to play some crazy parlor game together. What an experience! And always lively.

So here's the question: how much of our life revolves around what is comfortable and familiar to us? How often do we really do what Jesus said, and invite the poor, the outcast, the lame directly into our lives? The invitation in today's gospel is not an isolated one, we all know that. You remember that Last Judgment scene near the end of Matthew's gospel, when the king separates the nations on his right and his left, because when we feed the hungry or tend the sick or house the homeless or visit the prisoner... we encounter Jesus. In a couple of weeks we'll hear again the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, and how throughout the rich man's whole life, Lazarus lived on his doorstep, but he never paid him much attention. And over time a great chasm grew between himself and Lazarus; only, Lazarus wound up close to God heart, and so the rich man found himself separated from God by that same great chasm.

How do we include the poor in our lives? That's the question. It is not so easy, because life is so segregated -- we don't live in Africa, or in Jonestown, Mississippi, or in a homeless shelter. But besides that, it seems too often that our lives are full already. If we're young, we have school, or we're deciding who we are or what we want to become. If we're a little older, it seems we're busy enough with our own marriage, our children, our careers, our parents. If we're still older, well, we

have grandchildren, or health issues. But Jesus calls us to invite the poor into our lives nonetheless, to live in Solidarity -- that's a great Catholic word. It's not just about eternal life, it's really about the fullness of life right here on earth, right now. So I'd like to suggest a few answers, and those suggestions might inspire you to find what works for you.

My first suggestion is to do something that "breaks the mold" in your life. One of those things is something I'm recruiting for right now, called JustFaith. Some of you got invitation letters or calls about it, and it's been in the bulletin. Quite simply, the participants in JustFaith read and discuss books together about poverty, or racism, or violence, or a more simple lifestyle... and look at videos together, listen to guest speakers, take field trips where we meet and talk with the homeless, the poor, the immigrant... and we pray about it all together, as a small faith community. It's like an extended retreat. Sometimes to make deep changes, we need deep experiences. How often do we try to break the mold?

My second suggestion is to do something that brings you in regular personal contact with the poor. I know we have a lot of parishioners that regularly provide food for the hungry -- parishioners cook for the Orion Center, our St. Vincent de Paul visits families, we have a group of ladies once a week who make sandwiches for the Francis House...but some of these efforts need more help. Cay McVicar, one of our Sacred Heart Shelter coordinators, contacted me this past week and said they needed another coordinator for the Sacred Heart Shelter meals, and they also just need more people to help provide the meals. Whatever it is ... find something that will enable you to regularly make personal contact with the poor, to talk with them, to understand their lives, to let those lives touch yours.

Finally, do something important for a particular person in need. I'd like to make a little plug for our friends in Namitembo, and for this year's Elephant Stampede. I actually think this year's Stampede needs help. I also felt that I needed to take my own advice here, to figure out what else I could do to connect with the poor. So I would like to announce today that I'm "coming out of retirement!" In spite of the 25 pounds I've put on since I had knee surgery & gave up running a couple of years ago... well, I made a commitment several weeks ago to start training again, to run in this year's Stampede. And IT'S HARD! Much harder than I thought it would be. But I'd like you to join me, first by coming to the Stampede and seeing if I can make it across the finish line! But I'm also making a general appeal to the parish -- for parishioners or families or classes at either of our schools -- to sponsor me in the Stampede by joining me in sponsoring a student in the Trade School. These students already pay tuition -- this would be for the unmet costs of that education. Pick one individual student -- we'll show you the student's picture, what they're taking... and you can change that one individual student's life by giving that student a skill. You can find one of these brochures on our "Sponsor a Student" idea on the table after Mass.

Or ... do none of these things. But heed today's gospel! Do something to personally connect your life, & your family's life, with the poor, the lame, the prisoner, or the immigrant. Trust me - - it will make bring your life so much more abundance.

Deacon Denny Duffell