

These last three Sundays we have been reading a section from Matthew's gospel that is often called the Eschatological Sermon – that means it's about the end time. Two Sundays ago we heard the story of the 10 virgins, five of which were wise and five were foolish, and you might say that the message was that we should always be alert, *always ready to act*. Last Sunday we hear about three servants who were given talents, and you might say that the message was that, whoever we are, whatever we have been given, we *must not be afraid to act*. And today the Church places this scripture before us, on this Christ the King Sunday, this final Sunday of our liturgical year, because here Jesus gives us a last reminder of *HOW and WHY we are to act*. These words today from Matthew's gospel are the very last words of Jesus before Matthew begins the account of Jesus' passion and death. They are so well-positioned there because they sum up everything Jesus has taught his disciples during his public life.

I'd like to tell you a story. It's about someone I want you to know. Liz Houlihan and I are baseball fans, and for the last several years we've gotten a special 16-game ticket package, so we go to a lot of games together. We usually park for free about a half-mile away, and always enter the park at the center-field gate, heading for the left field bleachers, which is where our seats are. And when you walk that way, you see many of the same people as you go by. There are several stands of people selling packaged food – candy, crackerjacks, peanuts and sunflower seeds – and it's all less expensive than inside the stadium. There someone selling hotdogs, there's another vendor selling grilled bratwurst, with sauerkraut. There are always a few people buying and selling tickets. And there are also beggars. There's usually at least one guy playing a guitar or some other instrument. There's always one guy with a sign that says, "Why lie? I need a beer!" And then there's one elderly lady sitting in a wheelchair with a sign that says "Please help."

Now, Liz and I usually bring some food with us, so we never stop at any of those vendors. Occasionally we do have an extra ticket or two for some reason, so we'll sell it to one of the scalpers – of course you seldom get even half price for it. And I tell you, I don't drink beer myself, and I'll be darned if I'll ever buy a beer for that guy with the sign. But something happened to me, and this summer, I decided that I just couldn't pass by that elderly lady anymore. So one game day when we came to that lady, Liz and I just stopped. We said hello, and gave her a couple of dollars, which she put in a cup she held on her lap. And the next game we went to, we saw her again, said hello, gave her a couple of dollars, and I said, "My name is Denny"; Liz introduced herself too. The lady thanked us, and said her name was Ruth. We said we went to a lot of games, so we'd probably see her again. And this went on, all through the summer.

Ruth was almost always in the same place, sitting in her wheelchair, and always had an oxygen hose that went up to her nose. She's very thin, with gray hair and somewhat leathery-gray skin. She usually had a blanket on her lap, and when it gets colder she has an old coat wrapped around her. As the season was ending we gave her a card, with something extra, and asked her what she was going to do now that baseball season was over. Ruth said she would go to the soccer games and Seahawk games, but of course there weren't as many of those games, and the weather would be getting colder. Ruth wasn't very specific about where she lived or what she would do when all the games were over, or when it got too cold, and we didn't want to press her. Finally, we said goodbye, and told her we hoped to see her when the season started again in the spring.

You know, I often think about Ruth. I think about her especially now, as the weather turns cold. I hope and pray that nothing bad happens to her. You know, I sometimes hear individuals talk about beggars as if they made a lot of money doing it, and then when they're done they go home to a good life. But I wouldn't want to sit in a wheelchair holding a sign, while people walk past you, constantly ignoring you, most of them trying not to even make eye contact. And so if you go

to Seahawk games, I want you to look for an elderly lady in a wheelchair, there can't be too many of them. If you see her, introduce yourself, give her a few dollars, and ask her for her name. You could tell her Liz and Denny are thinking of her.

I want to acknowledge that parishioners here at St. Bridget parish support the poor in a lot of ways. In a few minutes we'll collect food for our food bank – a lot of that food goes to the families living in subsidized housing over at Sand Point, and the folks in our St. Vincent de Paul visit there almost every week and help them out. Just a few weeks ago, a lot of you went down to the Urban SoupLine, a fundraiser for the Sacred Heart Shelter, which provides temporary housing for women and families, and some of you also bring food down there and cook them a good dinner. Some of you help cook for the Orion Center – did you know they're now feeding around 70 young people at a time, mostly teenagers, living on the street! And there are parishioners who make sandwiches every Wednesday morning for the Francis House, and still others active in the 2nd Sunday meal program at St. George Episcopal Church, organized by the Mennonites. This is all true. But there are a LOT of poor out there nowadays, more than one person or parish can serve. In a couple of Sundays we'll have the collection for Catholic Community Services – this is one of the best ways you can reach them. As our state and federal governments face continuing cuts in service for the poor, CCS offers many excellent organized ways for us to do what we can, to meet a growing need. We should all be generous, very generous. We have homes, we have a hot meal to look forward to this evening, a bed to sleep in.

Today's gospel tells us that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do for Jesus. Do we want to know how to find Jesus? ***Serve the poor. Tend to their needs.*** Do we want Jesus in our life? ***Get to know the poor by name. Love them as we would love Him.***

I would like to tell you another story. When I told you about Ruth a few minutes ago, I began by saying something happened to me, that I couldn't walk by her anymore. This is what happened.

It was last winter. It was a cold Thursday night, I think about 10:30 – there was still snow on the ground, ice in places. I know it was Thursday because I regularly bowl on Thursday nights, at a little place up in Richmond Beach, and that night I came back home via Lake City Way. And I was hungry so I stopped at Dick's. I was the only customer there – it was a bleak night. And as I placed my order, I saw this guy, standing maybe 50 feet away, by the entrance from the street. I could see he wasn't dressed very warmly. So I ordered something extra, and when I drove out, I stopped by him & got out of the car. I said he looked really cold, and asked him if he wanted something to eat. He said thanks, and took the food, and we chatted for a bit. He was young, maybe in his mid-20's. He said he just got out of the hospital, and I could see a bandage on his shoulder and neck. He said he had gotten hurt when he arrived in Seattle, and now that he was out of the hospital he didn't have a place to go to. And when he said that, I have to confess that I didn't know what to say. Finally, I told him I needed to go, and I gave him a few dollars, which he thanked me for, and I left.

When I got just a few blocks away, I had a feeling that I should go back. But I didn't. I couldn't make myself turn the car around. Instead, I went home, to my warm house. And I went to bed but not to sleep. And it finally came to me what was wrong. That young man was Jesus. He was hurt, alone, and cold on a miserable night. My head kept trying to tell myself that I was just being foolish about this, but my heart knew the truth, and wasn't buying it.

Don't you miss Jesus.

Deacon Denny Duffell, November 20, 2011