

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXXIII "A"
NOVEMBER 18/19 2017
ST. CECILIA FEAST DAY CELEBRATION

Because of its work of sustaining our physical life our heart also functions as a metaphor for the whole of our life. To put your "heart" into some idea or project is to commit all your energy and resources to it. Such "heart giving" can literally consume a person's every waking hour. To give one's heart is to give one's life—its affections, attitudes, values, hopes, dreams into the care of another human being. Giving one's heart is giving the gift of self. It is the most precious gift a person can give. This is what a bride and groom gift each other at their wedding and promise every day thereafter. But, hearts can be broken. Hearts can be abused, rejected or simply ignored. The joy and risk of giving one's heart is captured by the American composer Irving Berlin in his song: "Be Careful, It's My Heart."

Today's reading from the Book of Proverbs records the gift of a husband's heart to his wife and the manifold profits she produces as she invests his gift. The story is a metaphor of God's relationship with us. God through the gift of his love, his Son Jesus, has entrusted his heart, his life, his entire divine self to us, the Church, his bride collectively and individually. We all are recipients of God's heart. Today's Gospel parable prompts us to ask ourselves how we are living out of the gift of God's heart. In whom or what cause(s) am I investing it? Or am I burying it, ignoring it, letting it "rust out"? What eternal profit is my life bearing?

This weekend we celebrate our parish patronal feast of St. Cecilia. According to tradition Cecilia invested God's heart by opening her home to the early Christian community in Rome as a place where it could gather and celebrate the Eucharist. Going public with her Christian faith, eventually Cecilia was swept up in one of the periodic waves of persecution resulting in her martyrdom.

Recently I read the book, "The Shepherd Who Did Not Run" the story of Fr. Stanley Rother, a priest of the archdiocese of Oklahoma City recently beatified as the first native born United States citizen to be officially declared a martyr. Ordained in 1963 Fr. Stanley answered the call of then, now saint, Pope John XXIII to the church in the United States to

“tithe” priests to work in priest impoverished Central America. Fr. Stanley volunteered and was sent to Guatemala. There he gave his heart to the indigenous population, descendants of the ancient Mayan people. His work among them spiritually and socially to improve their life situation aroused opposition from the government at a time of political unrest. Numbers of people, including his bishop, urged him to leave. Fr. Stanley obstinately pointed out that he, like Jesus, the Good Shepherd does not leave his flock when he sees the wolf coming but stays and fights for his flock come what may. On the night of July 28, 1981 Fr. Stanley was murdered for his witness and ministry. As a concession to Fr. Stanley’s family, his parish released Fr. Stanley’s body to them, but excised his heart before sending his body to Oklahoma for burial. Today it still is kept in his parish church in Guatemala, because as his people continue to say, that is where his heart was fully invested.

Neither St. Cecilia nor Blessed Father Stanley Rother chose to be martyrs. Like all of us they were ordinary people. They lived their daily lives, like us, filled with the concerns that occupy us, but at the same time willingly gave their heart, shared the life and faith given them by God with those with whom they lived and worked. They risked everything through investing the heart of God and produced a bountiful harvest.

Years ago when I served our late archbishop Daniel Kucera the archbishop would end his Confirmation Mass homily to the young adults with this question: “When you die, God is only going to ask you one question: Is there somebody here in heaven because of you?” When I stand before God at death will there be someone(s) to say: “Welcome him in. Welcome her in. I’m here because of him! I’m here because of her!” It’s a question of the heart.

“Be careful,” God says, “it’s my heart. It’s not a watch you’re holding, it’s my heart. It’s not the note I sent you that you quickly burn. It’s not the book I lent you that you never return. Remember, it’s my heart, the heart with which I so willingly part. It’s yours to keep or break. But please before you start, be careful, it’s my heart.

(song)

Fr Jim Secora