



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for School Mass, 10 March 2006

Father Michael Brunner, O.S.B.

These are some harsh words this morning
From the gentle God-man we know
as Jesus of Nazareth.

He is speaking in the manner of the great prophets,
like Ezekiel whom we heard in the first reading.
And it's talk like that which made the prophets
unpopular with the powers that were.

Power – and authority – does not like to be criticized.

But notice how Jesus
quickly brushes past the scribes and the Pharisees.
Pretty much he figured they were hopeless.
They thought they had all the answers,
and they couldn't be bothered
to give serious thought to what Jesus said.
They could only think about how they might shut him up.

Jesus skips over them and goes right to us.
He expects us to be more righteous than they...

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the scholars and the lawyers and religion experts
who knew how to do everything just right.

That is really good news for us,

because it is very hard for us to do everything just right.

Very hard.

I lost my temper a few times this week
and used a few words I shouldn't have.

Maybe you did too, or something like that.

I know it's hard for you to remember to genuflect
when you pass by the tabernacle, or keep quiet...

A Pharisee would never forget to do that.

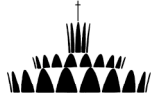
Pharisee's – and they still live – can give us the idea
that God gets angry or we must not be religious
if we don't fold our hands just right,
or make the sign of the cross just right.

Believe it or not,

the Russian Orthodox Church once split in two
over having to make the sign of the cross with three fingers
instead of two.

The Pharisees must have been busy there.

Pharisees always find lots of things to keep them busy.



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A friend of mine has a nice way of putting it...
he says they must not have enough grapes to stomp.
It can be tempting, if you've got a really good memory
and a technical mind,
to get lost in external stuff
rather than to dig into what Jesus asks of us.

Now what Jesus asks of us, ...

in fact he tells us it is necessary,
is not to have a good memory for all the details.
When we show up at heaven's gate,
we will not have a quiz like I give my Junior class.
No, what he asks of us is easier on the memory
but harder to do.

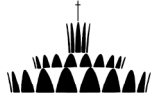
It is to live in such a way that we treat others
the same way we treat ourselves.

And most of us have to admit
that we treat ourselves pretty good.

We do take care of number 1.

When you get right down to it, in our own lives,
after God himself,
we are each a God to ourselves.

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It sounds shocking to hear it said that way, but it's true.

Well, at least it's half true...

because there's some of God in each of us.

And that's the problem...it's only half true,

and half-truths are very dangerous and misleading.

The Pharisee in us gets stuck on that half.

The other half of the truth is that

if there's some of God in me,

then there is some of God in each of you.

And there's a lot more of you, more others,

than there is me.

So...more of God outside of ourselves than inside.

And so Jesus asks us to treat others as if they were Him,

as if they were God too.

"Whatever you do to the least of people,

you do to me" he says.

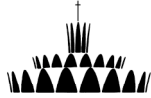
And he means it, every last word.

Perhaps conveniently for us,

our life circumstances keep us rather apart

from the really least of our brothers most of the time.

But he also says what we DON't do for them,



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we are *refusing* to do for Him.

The folks in the Inner city are our brothers and sisters too,
and so are the AlQaida prisoners in Guantanamo.

You are fortunate here that we have a service requirement
and a community service club

that allows you to begin fulfilling this divine expectation.

And I know many of you are giving up your free time
over this Spring Break

to take service trips to Appalachia and Mexico

to do for some of our lesser brothers and sisters who live far away.

What is more challenging about this demand of Jesus
is the attitude he expects.

You can have a Pharisee attitude about treating people well.

How many times have you heard a cheery voice say

“Have a nice day !”

just after they’ve given you a hard time.

Jesus demands a better attitude.

Don’t come in here and pray to me

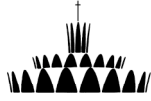
if you hate someone,

if you’re really angry with someone,

if you’ve hurt them,

if you’ve called them bad names and haven’t made amends.

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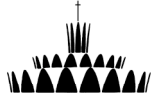
because that person, the Christ in that person,
has a legitimate grievance against you.

So settle the differences
with the brothers and sisters in Christ around you first.
Get rid of the hate, the anger, the jealousy, the hurt.

So, right now before we go any further in this mass,
I'd like to apologize
to Tim for what I said the other day in class
as he was ransacking the media room;
and I apologize to Jimmy, who led him in there,
for what I was thinking.

One of the reasons God expects us
to have this right attitude about and with each other
is that what we do here in church
is not a personal thing.
It's not just my prayer here, or your prayer here...
...take it or leave it, God.

This is our prayer, the prayer of this Priory family,
the prayer of the whole Church;
it is Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

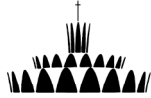


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praying in and through us,
and if we don't have the right attitude
and don't enter into it together on good terms,
we're diminishing the prayer
and messing it up for everyone else.
It's no different than if Ryan had messed up his lines
and hit all the wrong notes in Carousel.
When we greet each other at the sign of peace,
we should be emphasizing with that gesture
that we acknowledge the presence of God
in each person we greet
and that because of our outer behavior and inner attitude,
God and each one of us, God and I,
are on pretty good terms.

The Pharisees get their condemnation
because they miss this vital point.
They are not condemned because
they fold their hands just right,
or because they want to make liturgy beautiful;
they are not condemned
because they do external things just right.
They are condemned because they stop there



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and they teach others to stop there.

And we would be sloppy, disrespectful, and even foolish
if we paid no attention to externals;

we would be quite wrong if we were rude to God.

As in all human affairs, we need the correct balance.

Lent is a time to work toward greater balance.

Prayer, fasting...

...that is giving up some thing or things

and giving of your material wealth, money and time
to those in need.

You will have an opportunity next Tuesday

to donate money next Tuesday, a casual dress day,

to help victims of Leukemia,

a disease which has hit home here recently,

as Mr. Kilcullen's young nephew was just diagnosed

with that or some similar cancer.

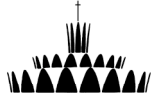
We have lots of opportunities to, lots of chances,

to live up to Jesus' expectations of us.

And he does not expect us to be perfect,

but to TRY to be perfect.

I hope this Lent is getting you more in balance spiritually.



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But that's not all.

I've seen your grades & lots of your reports this week.

This trimester just ended was tough in lots of ways, and I have seen the fatigue and the change of mood in many of you.

And so to help you get balanced,

God has led us to create Spring Break.

Among the many things

we can thank God for this morning,

we can certainly include that.

I pray that you will all be safe, whole-some and re-created during this break,

and come back ready to bring to a successful conclusion the goals you set for yourselves when this year began.

“Seek, and you shall find,

knock and the door will be opened.”

Your heavenly Father wants for you only good things.