

**R.S.V.P to God**  
Homily of October 9, 2005  
by Fr. Brian Joyce

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This morning, I want to do two things. I want to give a brief homily on today's gospel and then I want to take four or five minutes for a footnote about some of the changes that we are beginning to make at Mass here beginning this Sunday. So you can either say you get two for the price of one or you get double trouble!

The gospel: I have a very bad habit. I admit to it, and today's gospel makes me nervous about it. The bad habit I have is I am very remiss in returning r.s.v.p.'s to invitations I get, especially to weddings. I do a lot of weddings, but frankly I almost never, ever in forty-four years as a priest, go to wedding receptions. That's not the bad part. The bad part is most of the time I forget to r.s.v.p. And today's gospel makes me nervous because Jesus, in trying to tell us what the ways of God are like toward us and what our responsibility is, uses, as his example, the Kingdom of Heaven is like someone really important who invites people to a wedding, and .... they don't come.

Two phrases come to my mind, one describing God, in this parable, and one describing us. Describing God, the phrase is "unmerited generous grace and love." He invites us all again and again. And describing us is: "What's our response? What's our r.s.v.p.? What's our responsibility?" When it comes to the gift of grace, when it comes to the gift of God's love, when it comes to the gift of just being born, just the gift of life, what's our response and our responsibility? I'd suggest it under four areas that we hear again and again in the gospels.

The first response and responsibility is to praise God. That's why we are here, to praise God, in other words, to notice the gifts we have, to notice the gift of every day and thank God. At least, be willing to notice. You know, it is interesting. Jesus had a lot of critics. No one ever criticized him for being glum. They criticized him for going to too many parties. Jesus was saying, "Enjoy! Enjoy life that God gives you and give thanks and praise." The first responsibility is to praise God.

The second responsibility is forgiveness. I think forgiveness is the absolute signature of Jesus and of those who try to follow him. From the story of the Prodigal Son to the Good Thief on the cross, Jesus is saying to us, "If you are going to follow me, let go of resentment. Pass up on revenge. Be forgiving as your God is forgiving toward you." Praise and forgiveness.

The next response and responsibility is compassion. Just as Jesus walked in our shoes, felt our

pain, and reached out to others, we are called to be a people of compassion who feel for and reach out for one another.

And the fourth thing is to make a difference. We live in a universe that is dramatically evolving. We live in a world that is rapidly changing. And we only live a little time. We only live a short time. And during that, we are called to be people who make a difference for the better. So, that's our responsibility before the invitation of a generous and loving God: to give praise, to share forgiveness, to be compassionate, and to be willing to make a difference. .... And then be sure to r.s.v.p.! That's the homily.

Number two: This weekend we are asked to make some slight adjustments in the way we celebrate Mass together. Now, who's asking? This is not us. This isn't Christ the King. This came out from the Vatican in Rome in 2002. So, here it is three years later. We are a little laid back in California. Other churches around the world have been doing this for two or three years, but we are finally getting to it. And it is just a slight adjustment. But, when you are used to doing things one way and you're accustomed to it, even a slight adjustment can be very awkward and very irritating. So, the first question I ask is "Why are they doing this, and asking us to do this?" It seems to me, to be very honest, it's over three problems that somebody else has someplace else.... because I hear these problems and I don't see them at Christ the King. But, at the same time, we are one Catholic family together, so we try to adjust for one another.

The three problems, as I see them, is first of all, a fear and concern over spilling the precious consecrated blood and wine after the Consecration of the Mass. Now, that's never happened here. It's not a problem here. But, you will notice, we will be bringing the chalices up to the altar earlier, before they are blessed, already filled before they are blessed, and in metal rather than glass cups because someone somewhere is afraid that the glass might break. It's not a problem here but some people have that problem. It's a big Church!

The second problem is a concern over how you show reverence when you come to communion. Now, most people in the United States walk up and they show reverence by singing the communion song, by seeing the host and hearing "the Body of Christ" and answering "Amen." But, there are other people who feel it should be a genuflection. So they genuflect. There are other people who feel it should be a deep bow. So they make the deep bow. There are other people who feel they should kneel. So they kneel. This is not a problem here, but I've got to tell you, just alone in the East Bay, I can name parishes where all four things are done at the same time by the same congregation. It's like the Civil War! So, I think the Vatican has a pretty healthy suggestion to have one simple, common gesture, and I'll mention that later.

The third worry or concern that someone has someplace, but I don't think here, is that, when we have so many people up around the altar, sharing in the task, it gets confusing, and the distinction between who is ordained and who is not gets blurred. And look at him! (....gesturing toward the celebrant) If you can't tell the difference, there is nothing we can do to help you! But,

somewhere, someplace, people have a problem with that. So, none of these apply here, but we are a Catholic family. So we try to have some common procedures. We are not going to get it one hundred percent, and we are not going to worry about it. But, watch for some of the changes.

These are some. You don't have to do it all, but you will notice. You will notice, for example, that the new metal cups are being brought up a little sooner and with the wine already poured. You will notice the priest receives communion first, rather than along with the other Eucharistic ministers, and then shares communion with them.

Three changes directly affect you. Here they are. Toward the end of the collection, when the gifts are all up at the altar, the priest says, "Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the Father Almighty." What we usually do here is sit back and, if we feel like it, we pray an answer. and if we are wide awake we join in. And, if not, we just sit back and slouch. I think it is not a bad suggestion, when the priest says, "Pray brothers and sisters," we all stand and we stay standing together. And so, if he remembers, the presider, (whoever it may be!) will raise his hands and remind us. But, when you hear that "Pray brothers and sisters," we might stand together. That's easy, no big deal! No big deal!

Then, after we sing the Holy, we all kneel during the Eucharistic prayer as we always did. I have to warn you because, at every Mass, people, as soon as they hear the word "Stand," they stood for the whole Mass. Now, we kneel as we always do. Kneel during the consecration and finally, after we sing "Amen," we stand and we join in the Our Father. Now, I've got to be honest with you, most parishes in the Bay Area that I know of do not do what we do. We stand and say the Our Father. We greet each other at the Greeting of Peace. Then we kneel down. Then we get up to go to communion. Then we kneel down again. My sister calls it "Christ the King aerobics." Other parishes don't do that and we're being asked to get in line with everybody else because it's simpler. And that is, we stand for the Our Father, and we keep standing until we have actually come up and received communion. Then we go back to our places and kneel down or sit down, whatever you did before. Easy.

The last one is the common sign of reverence. What the Vatican has asked is that we make, when we come up to receive communion, just before communion, we make a head bow and then we say, "The Body of Christ.... Amen" and receive. Now, let me show it to you so you see what that bow is. This is what we are asked to make. Is everyone watching? All the ushers? Everyone in the crying room? OK? I'd better get up higher. Are you ready? This is it. Watch carefully. (Father bows his head slightly.) .... That was it! That was it! I say this because I notice some other parishes are introducing swan dives and nose dives and actually the practices of the local chiropractors are going up astronomically! And we are afraid we may get sued for damage to people's shoulders and backs. .... Just a simple head bow. That's easy enough. That's all. We can do this. Right?

During the Creed, when we get to the words, “The Word was made flesh,” it is suggested that we bow then too. We’ll probably forget that but we will put it into the bulletin so you see it. That’s easy enough. It can be a little deeper bow if you want because you can’t hit anybody as you would when you are out in the aisles. I am sure you will do fine. I am sure we priests will mess it up. .... But just be patient with us! ... Amen.