

Father O'Connor's Homily for 25 October 2026
Thirtieth Ordinary Sunday – A
National Priesthood Sunday

Exodus 22: 20-26
1 Thessalonians 1: 5c-10
Matthew 22: 34-40

For the last several Sundays, the Gospels have included parables, stories and object lessons that Jesus used to illustrate His teachings.

Today I would like to tell you three stories of my own that illustrate Jesus' teaching in this Sunday's Gospel.

Jenny found fault with nearly everything about the Church. She resented that her parents insisted that she go to Mass every Sunday. She was angry that they required her to attend religious education classes and participate in youth group.

In church she refused to sing or even answer any of the prayers. She looked as bored as she possibly could. And in class and in youth group she always sat in the back of the room, defiantly slouching in her chair.

Then one evening she came home from the library and saw her house in flames, with her parents standing out on the street. The fire department was putting out the fire, but she knew that nearly everything inside the house would be damaged or destroyed. This made Jenny angry too.

A few days later, some members of her parish youth group came to visit where she and her parents were temporarily staying. They told Jenny how sorry they were that this had happened. They had all pitched in and wanted her to have the envelope they had brought. "Maybe this will help you replace some of the things that you lost in the fire," one of the youths told her.

Jenny was really taken by surprise. "How could they be so nice to me after I had been so cold and rude towards them?" she wondered. She realized that, in spite of her aloofness, they had treated her with unconditional love. And she began to see the Church and her parish family in a new way. They had shown her that she was loved and that she belonged.

There is a story that comes from Russia, in the days when being a Christian put you at risk of arrest and punishment. A woman had an illness that had left her crippled. She only had the use of her right hand.

A neighbor would visit her after dark, out of fear of the Secret Police. This neighbor would always pick up the woman's right hand and kiss her index finger – and for a very special reason.

You see, this woman, crippled and with only the use of her right hand, used to spend her days at her typewriter. She would translate the Bible and other Christian books into Russian so that people could come to know God. And she would do all the typing with only her right index finger.

She came to see her condition as an asset rather than as a disability. "Because," she said, "no one would ever suspect that a crippled old lady would be doing anything against the government during the daytime!"

So she did her work – her ministry. And why did she do this? Because she loved God. And because she wanted to help other people know and love God too.

Where do these stories lead us?

Love is a commitment, and not necessarily a warm, cozy feeling. This applies to our love of God. And it also applies to our love of our neighbor. It is absolutely easy to love a neighbor who loves us back. But to love somebody who gives us nothing in return, to love someone that we find difficult – are we really supposed to love them too?

You know the answer to that question as well as I do. In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches us about "which commandment in the law is the greatest." And He says: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" [Matthew 22: 36-40].

How can we do this? By remembering that "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" [Romans 5: 8]. "We, for our part, love because He first loved us" [1 John 4: 19]. And Jesus teaches us to imitate His love for us by loving our neighbor.

"Your mere presence should be a ministry." That is a quote from Matthew Kelly. We, who love God, are to carry God's love to the person who is before us. We are to be conduits of God's love to others. Matthew's observation is accurate indeed: "Your mere presence should be a ministry."

In today's Second Reading, Saint Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "You became imitators of us, and the Lord.... so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth.... so that we have no need to say anything" [cfr. 1 Thessalonians 1: 5c-10].

Matthew Kelly has it right: Like the Thessalonians, “Our mere presence should be a ministry.”

Ron grew up with a mother who loved cleanliness. Everyone and everything had to be spic-and-span all the time.

Later in life, Ron volunteered to help in a soup kitchen, feeding people who were hungry and poor. They were serving corn bread and chili on that cold and rainy day. A man came over to thank him and reached out for Ron’s right hand. Ron noticed how dirty the man’s hand was. But he shook hands with him anyway, as the man said to him, “Thank you brother. Thanks very much!”

Ron was serving the next person in line when he dripped some chili on his own right hand. Without thinking, Ron licked the chili off his hand – the one he had just used to shake the soiled hand of the grateful poor man – and then was horrified due to his antiseptic upbringing.

But it later dawned on Ron that the handsome and well-scrubbed Christ that he knew from Christian art was not the only face of Christ in our world.

Ron realized that he had just been serving the poor Christ corn bread and chili.

These stories, what lessons can they teach us?

- (1) Her parish youth group members helping Jenny to know that she was loved and that she belonged;
- (2) A crippled Russian woman translating the Bible and Christian books and typing them with one finger so that others could come to know the Lord too;
- (3) The soup kitchen volunteer, Ron, realizing that he was serving the poor Christ corn bread and chili.

When we do our very best to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, we can come to a deeper awareness of the presence of Jesus right where we are, and a deeper appreciation for His family, our family, the Church.

And, in doing so, we are giving our neighbor the chance to see the face of Christ in us, and to experience His unconditional love for them through us.

Yes, indeed: “Our mere presence should be a ministry.”