

## Ordinary 31 11.3.24

I had a brilliant professor in graduate school who was fluent in about seven languages. He would lament in class how no one knows Latin and Greek anymore. I'm sure my face turned red when he said that. I was one among many in that class who had only a basic knowledge of Latin. And I never had a class in biblical Greek.

Even if you never took a class in Latin though, you would be familiar with the phrase **quid pro quo**. And even if that phrase doesn't ring a bell with you, you are very familiar with its meaning. **Quid pro quo** translates to "this for that". More specifically it implies that if you do something for me, then and only then will I do something for you.

Many years ago, I was eating at a restaurant on a Saturday after celebrating the evening Vigil Mass. The manager, who was from Philadelphia and knew that I was from Philly, wanted to put flyers for his restaurant on all the cars in the parking lot of the parish where I was the pastor. He wanted to do that while the folks were attending Sunday Masses. The request went something like this, "Father, you help me. I'll help you." When I demurred and the manager walked away, the guests at my table looked horrified. They couldn't believe I told him "no" and worried that there could be some trouble because I denied the manager's request. The manager was a rather imposing, perhaps even an intimidating figure. I told them it was no big deal. That's just how folks from Philly talk. To this day, I am still in good graces with that manager and still enjoy an occasional meal at his restaurant without any nefarious outcomes.

**Quid pro quo** captures the transactional mentality that is normative for most people in today's world. You do something for me, I'll do something for you. You don't do something for me, I won't help you.

While this might be the normative operating system for the world, it can never be normative for the Christian. The Scribe in today's gospel is not being transactional, unlike many of the others who were following Jesus. Some of those who followed Jesus were looking to be fed. Others wanted to be healed. The Scribe, instead, simply wanted to live as a disciple of Christ. To become one of his disciples, Christ reaffirms for the Scribe the teaching that the Father must be first in one's life. He then adds that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Doing so doesn't mean receiving riches. Doing so doesn't mean that everything in life will go perfectly for you. Doing so doesn't enhance or preserve the power or position you might seek. But doing so means you are a part of the Kingdom of God. Doing so means that you are united with Christ. Doing so means living your life to the fullest.

For the last several weeks, I've seen a number of beautiful examples where people didn't live by a **quid pro quo** ethic. Rather, they lived to the fullest the two commands that Jesus taught – making the Father priority number one in their lives, and loving their neighbor as themselves. So many parishioners have shared financial gifts with our parish and we, in turn, have been passing those gifts on to others. None of you expected anything in return for doing that. But in giving, you model Christ for others. And your giving is changing lives. Isn't that what Christ wants each of us to do?

I've also heard countless stories of folks who had a second apartment, condo, and even a house which they've shared with others who have been displaced. These people have given up a potential sale or potential rental income by letting someone who has been displaced stay there for free. They are not doing it for any reward. They are doing it to be Christ and to show Christ to others.

An individual in our parish whom you helped wrote a note of thanks for what they received. They stated in their note that a priest they knew once asked this question, "if your parish were to disappear, would the surrounding community notice?" This person affirmed that our community is mightily impacted by all the good our parish does. Doing these good things, without expecting anything in return, is bringing the presence of Christ to others.

Today, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, is the feast day of St. Martin de Porres. On Sundays, however, we suppress saints' feast days in favor of focusing on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Nevertheless, it would be

worthwhile and in line with today's theme in the scriptures to hear about St. Martin de Porres. Martin's father was a Spanish gentleman. His mother was a freed slave – either of Native American or African descent. His father abandoned the family when Martin was young. As a result, he grew up in dire poverty.

St. Martin de Porres wanted to become a religious priest. But local Church law would not allow it because of his mixed-race ancestry. St. Martin was allowed to associate with the local Dominican Order, but he was often mocked and ridiculed by those in that religious community because of his ethnicity.

In time, he was allowed to become a lay brother, doing all the menial tasks for the community and taking care of those in his community which the Dominicans looked upon as less than. He was assigned to the infirmary at the monastery. In his work there he was known for patiently and compassionately caring for the sick. He never complained. He never lamented how difficult his life was. He never expected anything in return for his ministry other than knowing that when he served the poorest of the poor and the sickest of the sick, he was serving Christ.

Historians say this about him: ***Martin was praised for his unconditional care of all people, regardless of race or wealth. He took care of everyone from the Spanish nobles to the African slaves. Martin didn't care if the person was diseased or dirty, he would welcome them into his own home.***  
(Catholic Online, 2024)

In his latest encyclical letter entitled **He Loved Us**, Pope Francis puts it this way, ***In loving, we sense that we come to know the purpose and goal of our existence in this world. Everything comes together in a state of coherence and harmony. It follows that, in contemplating the meaning of our lives, perhaps the most decisive question we can ask is, 'Do I have a heart?'***

The answer to that question is, "each of us has a heart." The deeper question to ask is, "whose heart do I have?" The Christian goes even further and asks, "do I love with the heart of Christ?" If we answer "yes" to the last question, then we like the Scribe, are not far from the Kingdom of God.

Amen? Amen!