

Gifts for the Common Good Thirty-second Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday,
November 11, 2015 8:15 AM **Wis 6:2-11; Lk 17:11-19** **St. Martin of Tours**
Armistice Day (If you think about enough of the issues, you realize we need salvation, we need redemption, we are really wasting our inheritance.)

“Terribly and swiftly shall he come against you, because judgement is stern for the exalted—for the lowly may be pardoned out of mercy but the mighty shall be mightily put to the test. For the Lord of all shows no partiality, nor does he fear greatness, because he himself made the great as well as the small, and he provides for all alike; but for those in power a rigorous scrutiny impends.”

This reading is from the Book of Wisdom, again, a book not accepted in the Palestinian canon, and not really reflecting ordinary Jewish thinking either. This is an unusual twist because according to the general feeling, you might say **the general theology of the Jewish tradition, those who had power were specially blessed**; those who were rich were especially blessed. That’s why when Jesus said that “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom,” the disciples were so amazed and astonished because that’s not the thinking they were brought up with. If anyone could get to the kingdom it must be the rich because they are already blessed. Jesus said, “Well, no.” Jesus is more reflecting the Book of Wisdom. **Those who have power and wealth are judged more strictly because of their power and wealth and therefore more is demanded of them.** And Jesus said this in many ways as well: **“From those who have more, more will be demanded.”** This is part of that wisdom tradition. So the author says, “For the lowly may be pardoned out of mercy but the mighty shall be mightily put to the test.” So the idea that God treats everyone equally is not exactly correct. **God treats everyone according to how God should treat them. Justice is not our idea of fairness.**

Now there is an idea that has circulated recently, as recently as the French Revolution, called **egalitarianism, meaning that somehow reason requires everyone on the same level plane.** That is not, first of all, realistic; and it does not reflect this Wisdom tradition. In fact, people have different gifts. But a gift is not given for oneself alone. One may benefit, but it’s really for the common good, and that’s what this is about: **using one’s gifts for the common good, not for oneself.**

Now if we look at the world today, we see that **all the centers of power are pretty much oriented toward self-aggrandizement.** Corporations want more profit. Political leaders want more power, blah, blah, blah, throughout all of society. So this is a very serious problem. We have to recognize it. We may make little steps toward helping this here or there, but it’s really a massive issue, a massive problem. Does it mean we are headed for some kind of great disaster? Perhaps. What will straighten people’s thinking out? And by the way, when people complain about lobbies and they complain about political parties, they should stop thinking about them and **think about the people who vote for them.** After all, **people are behind all the problems.** People argue for example about the gun lobby. Well, I wouldn’t worry about the gun lobby; I would worry about the people who buy guns, and that question: Well, why are they buying guns? Are they really ruled by fear? and so on. These are issues that have to be thought about. **If you think about enough of the issues, you realize we need salvation, we need redemption, we are**

really wasting our inheritance.

Well **St. Martin**, whose feast we celebrate today, was not a man who wasted his inheritance. He **was a man who saw and who did something**. The story of Martin, which he tells himself, he saw a beggar that was very cold. Well, Martin was a soldier. He wasn't wealthy. But he took his cloak and he cut it in two and he gave half to the beggar. Now that actually is a substantial gift. Later Martin had a dream. **Dreams in Scripture and in our tradition actually can sometimes be windows into the divine**. And in this particular case it was. Martin had a dream and he saw Christ. Mind you, he was a pagan. He was brought up in a military family, pagan military family, living in modern-day Hungary. His father was a soldier; he was a soldier. He had this dream. He saw Christ. How he knew it was Christ, I don't know, but he said he saw Christ. And **Christ was wearing half of his cloak**. That's why the gospel today is about "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren you do to me." That exemplifies; Martin's life exemplifies that gospel.

And Martin became a very significant force in the development of the Western Church. We celebrate Armistice today because of St. Martin. He became a pacifist. First of all **he became a Christian; then he became a pacifist**. And you might say oddly enough the patron of the French army and one of the patrons of France. And back in 1918 when finally Germany was exhausted by the war and said they wanted to sue for peace, the French set today, St. Martin's feast day, as Armistice—the patron of their army, who was a man of peace himself, a founder of several monasteries, a leader of many communities. **It all started with an act of substantial charity, substantial kindness. Yes, we can change the world.**