

**Proper 28 – 25 Pentecost – Year C – November 17, 2010 - Homily**  
**Isaiah 65: 17-25; Canticle 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19**  
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Of all the words from tonight's readings that jumped out at me, it was the word "busybodies." It just doesn't sound like a word that belongs in Scripture, and yet here it is in Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. According to the definition from Strong's Greek-English dictionary, the word busybody is apparently a person who is "officially inquisitive about other's affairs". The ever-popular draw of salacious gossip, along with a very human desire to compare ourselves to others, may well be irresistible. In the Scripture readings over the last few weeks, we've been hearing a lot about worldly distractions and focusing our energies on loving God and loving our neighbors. We've heard about faith in action, and keeping our eyes on Jesus and God's mission for our lives. Tonight, it seems that we are hearing about another form of distraction. Perhaps it is also one of the most interesting forms of diverting ourselves. Even in the first century, it became the subject of Paul's stern commandment to the church in the name of Jesus Christ. It is, of course, our fascination with others. Just for fun, I did an internet search on the word 'gossip'. Just as a kind of broad measure of how interesting other people are to us. You might be surprised to know that I got four hundred and twenty million hits on that word alone. Everything from Wikipedia's definition of gossip, to all kinds of celebrity gossip sites, youth gossip sites, magazine, and pop group information. For the purposes of comparison, I went ahead and did another internet search on the name 'Jesus'. How many hits do you think there are for Jesus? Well, actually there were only one hundred and seventy-two million, which is less than half the hits than for the word 'gossip'. My little experiment clearly doesn't qualify as a strict scientific study, but it's not too hard to figure out that we're almost certainly talking a lot more about other people than we are about Jesus. So what's wrong with this picture?

Paul has some harsh words for those who spend significant amounts of time focusing on gossip or should we say, being overly inquisitive about other people's affairs. He considers that kind of behavior very unhealthy for Christians. As one commentator puts it, "these idle busybodies are more than just a nuisance; they are not enemies, but they are malformed believers who are failing to exercise cruciform love for others." One way in which they are being burdensome to the community is through their failure to work, and earn their own living. Their burdensome behavior also extends to failing to work for the good of others. In so doing, they are also supporting a selfish lifestyle. Paul uses himself as an example. Even though he is an apostle of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and actually has to right to be supported by the community, he chooses to continue to work as a tentmaker, so that he is not a burden to anyone.

Behind Paul's own voluntary denial of his right to community support is a deliberate allusion to Christ's self-giving mission and ministry, as well as Jesus' selfless love in His sacrifice on the cross. To put it crudely, above all, Paul's point is to avoid the kind of people who want the benefits of community without giving anything in return. Those who may call themselves Christian, but basically believe that everyone else should take care of them. We are, of course, talking about those members of the community who are perfectly capable of earning a living, not those whom we are all called to love and care for in their vulnerability, including the disabled, children, and the elderly. Paul's commandment can be summed up as, you don't work, you don't eat.

Let's look at the implications of that even more closely in terms of good stewardship. Stewardship is about our contributions to the good of the community in response to our relationship

with Jesus. It is also about our participation in community for the good of the whole, by sharing our spiritual gifts, worshipping together, studying Scripture together, praying together and so on. From an early age, we teach our children how to share their toys with other children. For those who refuse to take responsibility for their part in sharing, it is tantamount to remaining a spiritual infant, instead of developing and growing into spiritual adulthood and maturity. So when Paul says, “If you will not work, you cannot eat,” what he is also saying is, if we don’t take responsibility for attending worship or praying daily or reading Scripture, we will not be fed, nor will we be in a position to grow spiritually, according to God’s will for our lives.

According to Presbyterian pastor, Neta Pringle, we also need to consider Paul’s point about community. That is truly being the Body of Christ, including you, me, and all the other disciples of Jesus. She says, “It is not enough to have an individual commitment to Christ. That commitment must be lived out in the context of a community of faith.” The essence of Christianity *is* community. Jesus is the head of the Body, and we all need one another to achieve our mission in and to the world in Jesus’ name. So why are busybodies to be shunned and shamed? Who amongst us can honestly say that we trust anyone known to be a busybody? Not me, that’s for sure. And therein lies a major problem. Busybodies disrupt community. They create and spread gossip. They don’t build up the Body of Christ, but build distrust, and perhaps even resentment amongst the community of faith, because of their unwillingness to give to the community, and to share in our work together.

One of our most important gifts we are blessed with as a community here at Our Saviour is hospitality. That makes us a very special group of people, and creates a wonderful environment that is welcoming and open in a healthy way. This is precisely the kind of community that facilitates spiritual growth through the faithful practice of our spiritual disciplines, both individually, and corporately. We are a community that joyfully welcomes everyone. A community that is genuinely caring and supportive. Word is getting around. New people are attracted to our worship and the way we live out our faith. We’re sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ more and more to the glory of God’s name! As Paul says, “Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” Our first priority is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.