

*Homily for August 8, 2010*  
*(Scriptures for today's liturgy)*

Since 1989, the Catholic Church has included an opportunity, at a funeral Mass, for a family member or friend to speak some words in remembrance of the one who has died. In the archdiocese of Boston the guideline for this is that only one person is to speak and for no longer than 5 minutes.

Over the years I've heard a lot of "words of remembrance" and the ones that have impressed me the most were those that spoke of the faith of the loved one and of the real gifts that person gave to others in this life.

We leave behind so many things when we die:

- family and friends
  - moments of shared love and joy
  - unresolved conflicts and resentments
  - personal accomplishments
- and the difference we made in our families  
in our communities, in our parish,  
in our neighborhood, at our jobs
- unfinished business of all kinds:  
things we wanted to do that never got done
  - memories of us that others will cherish and keep  
and memories of us that some will work hard to forget.

Yes, we leave behind so many things when we die...

My guess is that many of us are ready at the moment to summarize what we'll leave behind through insurance policies and in our "last wills and testaments" but how many of us have an awareness of what we'll bequeath in terms of spiritual treasure.

It's the "spiritual treasures" we leave behind us that make for the best "words of remembrance" at funerals.

Let me share some of the remembrances I've heard over the years:

- One thing my mother taught us was to respect everyone we meet, since we have no way of knowing what burdens they might be carrying.
- My father made every effort to teach us to be honest

in everything we say and do - and he lived what he taught us.

- Whenever we had a problem,  
my brother would always promise to pray for us  
and he encouraged us to pray, too - all the time.

- My sister was the kind of person who was always looking out for others  
and never counted the cost to herself.

- My friend was the kind of guy who had something good to say  
about everyone and never spoke unkindly behind anyone's back.

- My neighbor is someone who's really going to be missed  
because as long as she was with us,  
you knew somehow that God was still caring for the world.

Such remembrances are spoken of people  
like the folks you and I know.  
I'll bet as I recalled those quotes  
you thought of people in your own life  
to whom they might apply.

The question the gospel asks us today is,  
"Do words like these apply to us?"

Are these the kinds of memories others will have of us  
when we're gone?

Are we generous in letting go at least some of what we have  
in caring for the poor and those in need?

Are we working to find those  
"money bags that don't wear out,"  
investing in the kinds of treasure  
no insurance policy can deliver?

Jesus reminds us that,  
"Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."  
What do we treasure, you and I?  
Not what do we *wish* we treasured,  
but what do we *actually* treasure.

Shouldn't it be fair to assume  
that what we really treasure would:

- consume most of our time?
- command our fullest attention?
- receive our quickest response?
- be given priority on our calendars and schedules?

- bring us the most satisfaction?
- be among our most protected possessions?

If we answer those questions,  
we might discover what our treasure truly is  
and where our hearts are.

Will we be surprised by our answers?  
And if we are, what will we do about it?

There's a good chance  
that should Lord come at an hour we do not expect,  
our wills and insurance policies will be in order.

But what will you and I have planned with the Lord  
with regards to a kind of spiritual life insurance?

When the Lord comes,  
what "treasure" will he find us holding tight?

Who among the poor and needy  
will be ready to testify to our generosity  
when the Lord does an accounting of our profits and losses  
at the end of our lives?

What memories will linger  
in the hearts of those we leave behind?  
Will they be memories that want to be forgotten  
or memories to hold and cherish?

One of the greatest ways  
for us to learn to treasure what's of true value  
is faithfulness to the Lord's Table on the Lord's Day:

- faithfulness to this altar where he sacrifices everything,  
so that in our spiritual poverty  
we might become rich in his peace and grace;
- faithfulness to this table where he fills our hearts  
with the treasure of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist;
- faithfulness to this Sacrament we celebrate  
in his memory:  
speaking words of remembrance of his love for us  
on the night before he died and,  
in remembering him, finding him present among us.

May the Lord who loves so generously

lead us to find our heart's true treasure:  
may he help us lead lives worthy of his love,  
lives whose legacy will be treasured  
in the hearts of those we leave behind.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*