

# Homily by Monsignor Michael Hazard

St. Joseph Church, 936 Lake Street, Kalamazoo Michigan 49001

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**26<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

September 25, 2011

One of the good things about the Lectionary that has been in place since about 1970 is that we are hearing a much larger selection of readings from the Old and New Testaments than we did when the lectionary was the same year after year.

You probably know that we're going, more or less chapter by chapter, through the Gospel of St. Matthew. But unless you've been paying attention to the chapter numbers, you may not have noticed that we made a leap from chapter 20, verse 16 at the end of last Sunday's gospel to chapter 21, verse 28 at the beginning of this week's passage. Much of what's in between there, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we read on a Sunday last Spring: Palm Sunday.

There's another important passage in what we're not reading, something that sets the stage, really, for the story and parable we just heard. After Jesus comes into Jerusalem, he goes directly to the Temple and overthrows the tables of the people who are selling animals for sacrifice and exchanging coin-of-the-realm for temple-money. He quotes Isaiah the prophet: "My house shall be called a house of prayer," and adds: "but you are making it a den of thieves." In response, the blind and the lame come to him and he cures them. This leads to a confrontation with the chief priests and the scribes, who demand to know by what authority Jesus does these things, throwing out the merchants and healing the infirm. Jesus promises an answer to their question if they will answer his, first. *Where was the baptism and ministry of John from: from earth or from heaven?* Real trouble for them in that question: if they say from heaven, then the follow-up question will be, then why did you not pay attention to John? If they say, "from earth" then the people, who regard John as a prophet will be against them. "We don't know," is the best they can do. Neither will I answer your question, Jesus finally says. And then he offers the parable in today's gospel.

It's about traction. About the necessity of putting the car in gear, not just revving the engine. It's about not just hearing the word of God, but keeping it in a life of faith and holiness. It's about a faith in Jesus that moves us—no matter if our initial response to God's Word was negative—a faith that moves us to accept Jesus in an active way, join ourselves to his work, and make a difference for good among our friends and neighbors.

In another parable on a similar theme, Jesus says: It is not those who cry out my name who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who hear the word of God and allow themselves to be engaged by it. Those who hear my word and put it into practice are like a prudent man who builds his house on a firm foundation—a house which is able to withstand the storms and floods of life: because it's built solidly on rock: the life of the person is bonded with the word of Jesus. The Word of God has traction in the person's life.

What God wants for us—and not for us as individuals only, but for our society, for our country, for our world—what God wants for us is a way of compassion, an attention to those whose lives are more burdened than our own, a hand extended to the fallen, a word of encouragement spoken rather than merely thought. What God wants from us is what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, who let himself be guided by our need, not his comfort, and who took up residence in the human community so that we might be lifted into the family of God.

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But it will not do for us to say that we are God's children. We are God's children *in fact* when we live the Word of God spoken in our hearing, when we lay aside our privilege to share the burdens of our sisters and brothers in need.

What scares us about *doing* the Word of God? What keeps us from walking the walk as well as talking the talk? Let's take a minute for reflection.