

Homily: Nov. 4, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We celebrate our God for whom we live and die. St. Charles Borromeo, whom we commemorate today, demonstrated during a relatively short life his choice to live and die for the Lord—first, as a papal statesman, but also as a bishop and as a Christian with a big heart for a church needing reform, and for the poor and sick needing adequate attention. We, too, have been baptized to live in and for God alone, though we never completely fulfill that baptismal call. So we entreat our compassionate God.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, proclaims the good news that each one of us is a precious part of God's whole humongous creation—in life and in death. His language this morning was that every tongue—every little tongue—praise our God. Yes, each of us, each creature, is precious. That is consistent with Jesus telling us in an earlier Gospel reading, that we are worth more than many sparrows, and each hair on our head is counted. Actually sparrows, too, are precious, if every hair on our head is in the divine tally of worthwhile elements. Today's Gospel continues the theme of valuing small things, even celebrating with a neighborhood party, as the woman did for one small coin she rediscovered.

No wonder Jesus said, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance." I often puzzled over this statement. But, this time the intimated truth of Jesus' proclamation struck me. Of course, there simply are no people—no human beings on this side of life—who have no need of repentance. We all have need of repentance.

Scripture scholar, Bishop Sklba, states clearly what Jesus seems to be implying here. Sklba said, "Such a [repentant] person is prized more, no matter what the past, than the ninety-nine who don't think they need to change their minds [or behaviors] about anything. Self-righteous complacency is the most effective barrier to God's grace."

Yes, Jesus values very highly any signs or efforts of genuine repentance, which are the beginnings of new growth and development of true love. That is also what we declared a few minutes ago in the responsorial antiphon to the first reading, singing, "I believe I shall see the good things of the Lord, in the land of the living."

Every little bit of repentance is precious, because it helps transform this planet a little bit more into a world of joy, hope and peace. Consequently, the whole universe becomes just a little bit more like the heavenly kingdom God initially intended it to be. Let us celebrate any large or small repentant effort done by others and by ourselves.