

29th Sunday – Ordinary Time B
Oct 18, 2015
Deacon Ron Tocci

The other day I was browsing thru a book on Jewish humor, & I was struck by how many Yiddish words have become part of our culture.... Words we use every day. Words like *klutz*... Any klutzes out there?...Another familiar one is *schmooze* – a lot of schmoozing goes on before & after Mass...& then there's the word *tush* – that part of your anatomy that'll be squirming in your pew if I talk too long. ...My favorite Yiddish word is *chutzpah*. ...I just like the way it sounds: *chutzpah*. ...A person with chutzpah is someone very cheeky, who says & does things that require a lot of nerve, a lot of audacity....The book gave this classic example of someone with chutzpah: **a man has just been convicted of killing his mother & father, & he stands before the judge pleading, "Ur honor, have mercy on me...I'm an orphan."** Now, that's major league chutzpah. ...We have another good example of chutzpah with James and John in today's Gospel.

I mean, "Come on, what were they thinking?"...Those guys had been hanging around Jesus for 3 years, listening to Him, watching Him...It was just one chapter earlier in Mark's Gospel where we heard Jesus set the disciples straight for arguing about which of them was the greatest...So it took a heck of a lot of chutzpah for James & John to ask Jesus for seats of honor on His right & on His left... You see, they thought Jesus was going to be a great, powerful, conquering king, & they wanted to share in His power & His glory, but He tells them "Guys, you wanna be great, become a servant of others...You wanna be 1st, become last." ...Then He tells them that He didn't come to be a king who was to be served,...He came to serve & to give His life for many. This whole idea of equating greatness with servanthood was totally alien to the world back then, just as it is today.

Now Jesus didn't get angry at James & John; the other disciples did but not Jesus...Jesus had no problem with them seeking greatness...He wanted them, as He wants all of us, to be great, ...but not by the world's standard of greatness....You know, get a little power, a little authority,... a little talent, ...accumulate a little wealth,...then use it to get people to serve you... No, greatness in God's eyes has nothing to do with power or money or talent...God revealed to us what true greatness is by sending His Son to show those 1st disciples & to show us that true greatness is serving our brothers and sisters,...especially the powerless, the most needy, the most vulnerable.

In our world today, as it was in Jesus' time, the most powerless, the most needy, the most vulnerable, the most dependent on others are – of course – the children...This weekend, people of all faiths across the nation are observing *Children's Sabbath* – as a time to focus attention on the urgent plight of millions of children in our country & thousands in our county...Children who are hungry, ...children w/o access to health care,...children who are abused, neglected or abandoned, ...children who are victims of gun violence,...children in failing schools...children born into the pipe-line to prison...children w/o safe, loving families...The hope is that by raising our level of awareness about how these children are suffering, ...we will be inspired & motivated to respond and get involved in making a difference in their lives, in their futures,...in the future of our world.

A few weeks ago, I was showing our High School Service Group a video of many of the places – mostly in the city – that have been heavily affected by poverty, crime, drugs, hopelessness. As I looked out at the faces of those teens while they watched the video, I thought about their futures. ...I thought,.. you know it's a pretty good bet that none of them will ever be forced to sleep in a homeless shelter...or stand in line at a soup kitchen... They'll never lack for good

medical care. ...They'll get a good quality education in a relatively safe environment....most will go to college.....Odds are they'll never be abused or abandoned,...or live in a neighborhood ruled by gangs & staked out by drug dealers...or have an addicted or imprisoned parent...or become addicted or imprisoned themselves... Yep, I thought,... the future looks pretty good for these kids..

But, sadly, there are millions of boys & girls in this country & thousands in Monroe county whose future doesn't look so good...Now, I don't like quoting statistics in a homily, but I want 2 share just a few that give a picture of the harsh reality many children face every day...According to the Children's Defense Fund, every day in America, 2570 babies are born into poverty,...761 are born to teen mothers ...Every day 1532 children are born w/o health insurance...Every day in America 384 children are arrested for drug crimes, & 167 for violent crimes...Every day 2857 high school students drop out & 16,244 are suspended. ...Every day in America 1836 children are abused or abandoned ...Every day 48 children are injured or killed by guns,...Every day, 2880 children are aborted..This is what happens EVERY DAY in this country...Every single day in this so-called land of opportunity.

Of course, there are numerous causes for why so many children are suffering,...& the task of making things better for them is a daunting one,...but we can't afford to look the other way because we don't think we are equal to the task...Jesus calls us to be great by serving...Martin Luther King, once said, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve...You don't have to have a college degree. ...You don't have to make your subject & verb agree...To serve, you only need a heart full of grace. a soul generated by love."...The service we are called to is to reach out to these children with a touch of love...not only by giving of our resources or our time & talent to help them directly - these are very needed of course - but, also by doing something to change the structures & systems that are hurting and failing our children.

And we do this by speaking out to our elected leaders & representatives... **(as we've been doing recently w postcards to our cnty legis urging them to beef up childcare funding 4 low-income working families)**...We write them letters, send e-mails, make phone calls...insist that every decision they make on laws, policies, budgets,...will take into account, the needs of children and the effects their decisions will have on children. ...And we do this by supporting organizations that work & advocate for public policies that consider the welfare & protection of children...We support these organizations, not just with our \$\$\$, but by getting involved in their work....You want names & web sites of some of these local groups to find out what they do & how you might help? ...Look on the front page of today's bulletin....Give them a try.

My friends, when Jesus heard His disciples arguing about which of them was the greatest, He told them that greatness in the Kingdom of God is serving others especially the poorest, the weakest, the most dependent...Then He held up a little child & said, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me." ...My friends, there are too, too many children who don't know what it is to be welcomed, to be loved, to be safe, to be taken care of...

Pope Francis, whose genuine love for children was so visible during his visit to the US, ...while speaking to a group of Jesuit School students in 2013, said to them "It is inconceivable that there are so many hungry children,... that there are so many children w/o an education... ..Poverty today is a cry." The theme of Children's Sabbath 2015 is "How long must I cry for help? "...My friends, the plain truth is, we either answer the children's cry or we ignore it...As we come forward in a few minutes to take the Living Bread, our Lord Jesus Christ, into ourselves,

...let us ask Him for the grace & courage & the will to respond to that cry for help in whatever way & by whatever means He has given us the ability to do... AMEN!