

First an up-date, this past February I asked you to contribute to a permanent building for the New Bethlehem Center for Homeless Families. New Bethlehem committed to raising a million dollars towards the building – and I promised that Holy Family would raise \$600,000 of that amount. I have good news! You ended up giving \$775,000, and as of today we have raised \$1.1 million all together. We hope to break ground in early April. By the way, in the two years we've been open, 100 homeless families have been placed in housing – almost one per week. Congratulations and Thank you! But just a reminder . . .while our capital campaign has been a success, we still need funds for on-going operations – and lots of volunteers.

Now to my homily, with all that has been revealed in the last months and, really, the past few years, about the sins of clerics at all levels in the Catholic Church, why should you contribute financially to this parish? That is the question on my mind this week because I am supposed to give the annual stewardship homily today. Two weeks ago

we heard Alex and Robin Krueel give their witness talk. Then last week we had Fr. Dave Pavonka here for our parish mission, so I needed to put off my own stewardship homily for a week. But here we are, and it's time for me to address that question.

This week the Bishops of America are meeting – and the topic of sexual abuse by clerics, and the sins and coverups surrounding former-Cardinal McCarrick, will surely be front and center. And in the middle of all of this comes Stewardship Commitment Sunday. I certainly can understand any reluctance and even revulsion at the thought of sacrificing financially for the Catholic Church at this moment. And yet . . . there has never been a greater need.

Looking around the world it seems things are falling apart. And it's not just the Catholic Church. We just had an election that was very divisive – and that is because our country and society are very divided. We just don't like each other very much. In fact, if we're honest, we might even hate people who are on the other side – whatever side that

is. We're afraid of them and how they think. And the violence is starting to peek out and might get stronger. And that is in America – where there is a strong history of the rule of law. What about the rest of the world? It seems to many that dictatorship and authoritarian rule is on the march. Human life at all stages is threatened, tensions seem to be running high. The world is anxious and afraid – and divided.

What is the answer? The answer to all our sin, anger, fear and anxiety is Jesus Christ. We need Jesus. We always need Jesus, but right now that need should be clearer than usual. That is part of what hurts so much about the crisis in the Church. Our leaders seem to have a crisis of belief and confidence in Jesus. At least, they give too little evidence of living according to His way.

But without the message and love of the Savior the world spins off kilter. We must proclaim His message as persuasive ambassadors. And we can't let ourselves be silenced by shame or embarrassment

over false shepherds who have sinned horribly. The stakes are to great right now.

Where, then, are we to find the faith necessary to bring Jesus to the wounds of this world if not in the shepherds? Here I want to go back to the Gospel today. Notice who are the students, and who is the teacher here. Of course, Jesus is the ultimate Teacher. But in this incident of the poor widow giving her two coins, Jesus is using this poor woman to teach the first bishops of the Catholic Church how it's supposed to be done, what faith looks like. That has often been the way throughout the history of the Church. Ask any priest. If he's honest he will tell you that he has been edified and taught how to live the faith by humble lay people in his parish and home. That is still the case today. I hope our bishops meeting this week will remember similar lessons by the lay faithful in their own lives as they deliberate how Jesus wants them to react to this crisis of their own making.

But I hope we will also remember the lesson of the poor widow. What can you do to help the Church in these days? Pray, of course. Make known your support, and, when necessary, your disagreement in responsible ways. But you can also be a living example of faith to the rest of us by your fidelity in times of doubt. Some have, and will, leave. But on this Commitment Sunday I ask you to re-commit to the Catholic Church by continuing to support financially the work and presence of Jesus in the world.

The country and world have never needed Jesus more than they does now. And the greatest mechanism for the appearance and saving power of Jesus in the lives of all people is the Church, the Body of Christ. Like her head, Jesus, the Catholic Church is both human and divine. The humanity of the Church is in clear evidence today. The sins of Popes, Cardinals, Bishops, priests, and religious are now coming out in the open. But in the middle of all this garbage we must not forget the divinity of the Church. She is still Holy because she is the Body and

Bride of Christ. Jesus established her knowing that those He chose to lead her would sin. Think again of those twelve men He taught that day beside the Temple in Jerusalem by means of that poor widow. In mere days they would betray, deny, and abandon Him to the cross. Jesus knew He had chosen weak instruments of His grace. But He did it anyway because He knew that it would be He, Himself, who would use them. And He was more powerful than any and all sin.

Jesus remains effective and active in the Catholic Church despite our sins. The New Bethlehem Center is just one example of how that can work. That is why I ask you to recommit and even increase your giving to the parish today. This is the place and community above all others in which Jesus has chosen to dwell. In supporting the parish you also support the Real Presence of Jesus in our community and world. And we certainly need Jesus now. Thank you for your support and for living out the lesson of Jesus by imitating that poor widow.