26th Sunday in Ordinary Time: 9/28/22—All Masses

I don’t know how it works with other homilists, but sometimes, when looking at the readings in preparation for writing a homily, often a word jumps out at me as if it were surrounded by neon lights. That’s how it was earlier this week. The word that jumped out at me as if clothed with neon lights was the word “complacent.” Amos today says, ***“Woe to the complacent in Zion,”*** and then we have Jesus’ parable about the rich man who was so complacent that he didn’t even notice the beggar Lazarus lying at his door.

The word “complacent” means to be satisfied, to be unaware, to take for granted. It’s so easy for us to be complacent until something disrupts that complacency. It’s so easy to be complacent about our automobiles until our battery dies or we have a fender-bender. It’s so easy to be complacent about indoor plumbing until our sewer backs up. It’s so easy to be complacent about our health until we get Covid or we break a bone. It’s not only easy to be complacent about our cars, indoor plumbing, and our health; it’s so easy to be complacent in, to unaware of, to take for granted our relationship with God. That’s what we find Amos and Jesus criticizing in today’s readings. What we find in today’s second reading, in Paul’s letter to Timothy is Paul being like that fender bender, like that sewer back up, like that broken bone by awakening Timothy from his complacency in relationship with God when he writes, ***“Pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called.”***

Today, we begin our three weekend journey to renew our Time and Talent, our Prayer and Participation, Stewardship Covenant with God and his people here at St. Cletus. This process gives us the opportunity to ask ourselves, What is the purpose of a parish in the first place? I think that it has to do with complacency. We all have a tendency to become complacent in our faith. We as a parish are called to awaken each other from our complacency in faith, and we together are called to awaken our world from its complacency in faith.

Some years ago, I came across this story which describes so well that complacency in faith as well as the awakening from that same complacency. It is simply titled, “When I first became a pastor.”

***When I first became a pastor, I frequently heard questions like these: “Why don’t they fix the roof? Why don’t they fix the kneelers? Why don’t they mow the lawn more often?” I kept asking myself, “Who are the ‘they’ these people are talking about?” I weighed about forty-five pounds more than I do today, but that hardly qualified me to be a “they.” Were the “they” the Rosary Society? No, because some of these women were asking the same questions. Perhaps the “they” were the bishop and the chancery staff. Hardly, because there are nearly 80 parishes in the diocese, and the chancery staff cannot be repairing leaky roofs and broken kneelers or mowing lawns for 80 parishes. I was convinced that I had to have a “they.” So I formed a parish council. I did not know a thing about parish councils, and I really did not care. All I wanted was a “they.” But a funny thing happened. The “they” spoke of the parish as an “it.” “Whatever it needs, Father, you do it.” I was crushed; I was a pastor of an “it”, and “they” wanted me to supervise “it.” Glory be to God, I was a plant supervisor! Well, time went by. The plant supervisor was supervising the “it” and “they” were glad to belong to “it.” One evening, the “they” gathered to discuss the “it.” I mentioned that five dead elm trees on the parish property needed to be cut down. I reported to my “they” that the lowest estimate for the tree cutting was $75.00 a tree. The “they” winced. Then came the moment of truth. One of the men said, “Why don’t we cut them down”? The “they” became a “we” and what we did was cut down five “its.” After that, a “we” parish began to move from a position of “belonging” to the church to one of “being and doing” Church. The “it” was really a “we,” and there was no “they” after all. Church is a verb as well as a noun. The pastor is not the only verb in the parish. Everyone in the parish churches the Church. A pastor pastors best when he enables his people to become conscious of their great resourcefulness. Ministry does not flow out of Holy Orders. It flows out of baptism. When our parishioners moved from the “it” and the “they” to the “we” idea of parish, they were reconciled to a whole new understanding of themselves and their relationship to the Church. After that, they became reconciled to the changes they once thought were so stupid when they regarded their Church as a “they” and an “it.”***

Next weekend we will hear from parishioner Beth Del Rosario about what Stewardship of Time and Talent means to her. Please take some time to reflect on the stewardship info you received recently and to see how, by committing your Time and Talent on October 9, each of us can help continue to turn this “it” into a “we.”