

Feast of Christ the King A November 20, 2011 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

As you can see, I am wearing a new vestment, a very beautiful one. When the parish began 49 years ago, Fr. Gilligan purchased a nice set of vestments for the occasion. They had the words Humilitas, Latin for Humility, on the back of them. We felt that it was a good idea to purchase a new set of white vestments to mark our jubilee year. There is a dalmatic, the robe the deacon wears, and a pall, the cloth we place over the casket at a funeral, that matches this vestment. May they be a reminder to us of the jubilee we are celebrating.

We have come to the end of the liturgical year, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Next week we begin a new year, we begin the Advent season. This past year we have been reading almost exclusively from the gospel of Matthew. Matthew has painted a beautiful portrait of Jesus as the new Moses, the teacher. There are more sayings and teachings of Jesus in this gospel than in any of the other gospels.

I believe the position of today's gospel is important. It is at the very end of the teachings of Jesus, what follows is the beginning of the passion of Jesus. For 25 chapters Jesus has been teaching, trying to get his message across to the people. They continue to miss the point, not just the religious leaders of Israel, but even his own disciples. How discouraged Jesus must have been. It is almost like he is saying, "let me try one more time, this is the bottom line." And then he begins, "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink . . . Whatever you did for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me." The message is certainly clear, we are going to be judged by how we treat those who have less.

We received a letter from our archbishop, Archbishop Dennis Schnurr, in this letter he points out the scourge of poverty, quoting from the U.S. Census Bureau that states that at least 46 million Americans are now living below the federal poverty line, and one in four children. He said that in some of the counties in our archdiocese the unemployment rate is 12%. I am personally aware of the difficulties some of our parishioners are experiencing. We recently had a stewardship program, asking those who could to consider increasing their contribution. I received a number of letters from parishioners who told me that their income has been cut back, and they regret they cannot increase what they give, in fact some might have to cut it back a little. We certainly understand, we do not expect anyone to do what they cannot do. I am sure there are others. It just points out that many here are facing hard times.

There are many things happening this week. This weekend we have the annual Campaign for Human Development. Our archbishop urges us to support this campaign which tries to help the poor help themselves. Our parish has always supported this program. I remember how enthused Fr. Gilligan was for this program when it started 40 years ago. The archbishop spoke of other ways we can help the poor. He spoke of the great work done by the Catholic Social Services in our area. I am honored to be serving on their board and learning about the many ways they serve the poor. We have our own St. Vincent DePaul conference and our Diakonia, our support of meals for St. Vincent Hotel, our food barrels, and other ways we serve the less fortunate. Our archbishop and the bishops of our country urged us to be mindful that, as Congress faces the budget and the debt issues, that we not place an undue burden on the poor and the vulnerable.

Finally I think of Thanksgiving Day. So many of us in this country have been so blessed with so many things. I think of that vestment purchased 49 years ago by Fr. Gilligan which had the word Humility written on it. We who have been blessed need to be aware that all we have is a gift from God. God gave us the talent and good fortune to have these blessings. And the Lord tells us that we will be judged by how we share those gifts with all of our brothers and sisters.