23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time: 9/4/22—5:00 PM, 7:30 and 11:30 AM

I have here my pocket calculator. In the 9:30 and 11:30 versions of my homily last Sunday, as a way of emphasizing the grandeur and beauty of God’s love for us, I spoke about the number of grains on Earth versus the number of stars in the Universe. I related that I had heard years ago that there were as many stars in the Universe as there are grains of sand on Earth but that more recently I’d heard that, because of the Hubble telescope, astronomers were saying that there were five times as many stars in the Universe as there are grains of sand on Earth. Last weekend I voiced that I wondered if that guestimate itself had been updated even more recently so I went to the Internet asking **“how many grains of sand there are on Earth”** learning that there are 7.5 sextillion grains of sand at which point I also “googled” asking **“how many stars there are in the Universe,”** learning that there are now believed to be 200 sextillion stars in the Universe. I then stated that I divided that 7.5 sextillion grains of sand into those 200 sextillion stars and found out that there were twenty-six times as many stars in the Universe as there are grains of sand on Earth. I did that little math problem on this pocket calculator. 26.666666 times in fact. Can you imagine?

But I don’t have this calculator here to talk about last weekend’s homily. I have it here to talk about this weekend’s homily. Notice how Jesus repeats the same wording in the parables of the man building a tower as well as the king marching on another king to do battle, “would he not first sit down,” he says; “would he not first sit down” to calculate, to decide. What we find Jesus describing here is precision in the builder and precision in the king. Calculators like this one are pictures of precision. We use them to figure out our taxes, to balance our checkbooks, to keep track of our credit card charges, to tip a waiter at a restaurant, the better bargain at the store, and the like to make sure that our calculations are precise. Jesus is inviting us to be as precise in our discipleship and in our following of him as we are precise in more minor things like in figuring out the tip for a waiter or in balancing our checkbooks.

Earlier this week, I happened to listen to Bishop Robert Barron’s Epiphany homily from 2021. In it, he described what the Magi gave the Christ child in this way. ***“What did they bring to the Christ child? They broke open these precious gifts, these marvelous precious things, to give him…So often we don’t give Christ what is best in us. Do I give Christ what is best in me? The best of my mind loving him with my whole mind? Do I give him the best of my heart with all my passion and my emotion? Do I give him the best of my talents and abilities? Or do I reserve the best of me for my secular pursuits, my career, my worldly goals? Do I love him with all my strength? What gift do you break open when you come to Christ? That’s the question, and the Magi break open these hyper-precious gifts. What is the best in you? Name it. What is the best in you? Do you break open the best in you to give it to Christ***, ***or are we reluctant and reticent measuring our lives out to Christ with coffee spoons, measuring out our gift to Christ just a little bit at a time? No, the idea is to break open the coffers of your heart, mind, and soul giving him the best you have.”*** (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FXGJNBqilI)

We are far from the feast of the Epiphany, but isn’t this always the challenge for us who call ourselves Christians, who call ourselves disciples of Christ? Jesus is the very best that the Father could give to us. If that is so, what is the best that we can give to him?

We all have pocket calculators like this one helping us to be precise in so many ways. Maybe whenever we use a calculator like this, it could serve to remind us to be as precise in our being disciples of Christ as we try to be as precise in the balancing of our checkbooks.

Now this homily could end here and be complete. However, as I was writing this homily over this past week, it struck me that not only did the Father give us the very best he could in his Son, Jesus, but that he also gave us the very best he could in those stars that are 26.666 times more numerous than there are grains of sand on Earth. If this is so, isn’t this number of stars even more of a reason for us to respond to God by trying to give him our very best in return?