Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: 2/12/23—5:00 PM, 7:30 and 9:30 AM

I have here a baseball Cardinals jersey. Those of you who are dyed-in-the-wool baseball fans know that tomorrow, February 13, is the day when pitchers and catchers are to report for spring training thereby beginning the 2023 baseball season. Even though I am a Cards fan, that’s not why I have this jersey here. I have it here to point out something about birds, that is, how birds, like cardinals, drink.

I don’t know if you know this or not, but birds don’t have cheeks and lips, so birds lack the ability to suck liquid into their throats as other animals do. Birds drink by filling their bills with water and then tilting their heads back, using gravity to send that water into their digestive tracts. Noticing that behavior, one spiritual writer centuries ago observed that a bird always tilts its head upward not only for the water to flow into its body but also to give praise and thanks to God who provided that water! What an interesting insight linking a bird’s manner of drinking water with gratitude and praise! What a different world we would have if we followed the behavior of birds and tilted our heads back in praise and gratitude whenever we drank any liquid or whenever we experienced any gift. Yet isn’t that really what we are called to do, to give praise and thanks to God throughout the day, like a bird drinking water?

We continue to hear today from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, and he focuses here on our relationships with other people. He directs us not only to not murder another person but also not to get angry with that person. He directs us not only not to commit adultery but also not to take advantage of another sexually. He directs us not only to not to make false oaths but also to use our words well bringing honor to our ability to speak and to communicate. How different our world would be if we followed Jesus’ words here today, and birds can teach us how to follow Jesus’ directives. What about if, when we encountered another human being, when we thought of our sexuality, when we spoke any words at all, we would tilt our heads back to give praise and thanks to God for the miracle that is that other human being, to give praise and thanks to God for our ability to commit ourselves to another person and create new life, and to give praise and thanks to God for our ability to speak and communicate? We would indeed have a much better and healthier world if we would learn from the actions of birds in tilting our heads in gratitude and praise for everything throughout the day!

Imitating that action of birds in expressing gratitude and praise to God also applies to the action we call stewardship. This weekend we here at St. Cletus are reviewing our financial stewardship commitments, the sharing of our financial resources with God and, in particular, this parish community. In a few moments, we will hear from our parishioner Mark Riordan about what stewardship of generosity means in his life. Either this past week or this coming week, you will receive a letter from me encouraging us all to honestly review our giving this past year and encouraging us all to share our resources as God has given them to us. Please remember how important it is that we tilt our heads back with gratitude and praise to God with it comes to our financial resources as birds do when it comes to drinking water.

(after Mark’s lay witness)

Wouldn’t it be great if all of us would throw our heads back in praise and gratitude to God throughout the day as automatically as birds do that when they drink water? Maybe every time we see “the birds on the bat” this summer will remember to do just that.