

Homily for the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*“If you’re gonna help someone carry their cross,
don’t give them the bill.”*

October 26th, 2008

Fr. Trey Nelson

Introduction:

“If you’re gonna help someone carry their cross, don’t give them the bill.”

(Pause)

“If you’re gonna help someone carry their cross, don’t give them the bill.”

(Pause)

“If you’re gonna help someone carry their cross,” then, what?

(Everyone): “don’t give them the bill.”

You know, I’d never heard that expression before a few weeks ago when we were on our annual clergy retreat. And let me tell you, sitting there with about 40 other priests, when we heard these words, they hit all of us right between the eyes. In a moment, I’m going to share with you why they hit me, but, for now, I would ask you to think about whether or not they hit you.

Are you the kind of person who, when you do something for someone, when you choose to sacrifice in any way for anybody, whether it’s right there in your own home or anywhere else—do you

do it with or without expecting anything in return? Be honest. And before you are tempted to give the quick answer, “absolutely not. If I’m gonna do a good thing, I just do it,” stop and think about it. You and I say we don’t expect anything in return? Yeh, right. Every now and then, we all do. We at least hope for something in return. How many times, for example, have you thought, said, or heard it said (especially in our relationships with our children), “*all I expect is a little respect.*” Or something like, “*it would be nice to get a little thank you every now and then. That’s all. Just a little one.*” Well, guess what. What if you don’t get it? Are you not going to do the good thing for that person, simply because you won’t get anything in return? Of course not. We do it, because it’s the right thing to do. We do it, because God wants us to do it.

Most weekends of the year I would take us right to the Gospel for the day in our homily. Today, I would like to take us directly to our first reading from the Book of Exodus. Listen again to these words: “*if you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people,*” says the Lord, “*you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest in return.*” The reading goes on to say, “*if you take his or her cloak from them as a pledge, then you shall give it back by sunset, for it is all that he has to cover himself with.*” It’s like saying this. “*Yeh, sure he owes you money. And, sure he oughta pay you back. But are you gonna make him suffer in the meantime?*”

The Book of Exodus, in part, was an explanation of the law, and if you followed the letter of the law, then you were in good shape, living a good life. For just a moment today, however, I would ask us to take our thinking one step further. Take it deeper than the letter of the law. Take it deeper than obligation, to the level of “*I do it, I help someone, because God wills that I do it.*” That’s the spirit of the law. That’s the spirit of “*you shall love your neighbor as*

yourself.” We can do it because it’s the right thing to do. Period. Or we can do it with a bad attitude. ***“If you’re gonna help someone carry their cross, don’t give them the bill.”***

The bottom-line is that we are suppose to help each other carry our crosses, whether they’re the really big ones or just the day to day ones. And the choice is not just *whether or not* we will do it—but *what kind of attitude we do it with.*

1. I think, first, about my own life and ministry: this is my calling. This is what I said “yes” to. But what’s my attitude going to be when I have to go into situations that I don’t want to go into? There are things that I like to do, places I like to go, situations in which I’m very comfortable. But either way, when I go into those places and situations, I must go with one of two attitudes. I can go in with a face, a body language, and an attitude that says, ***“I don’t want to be here.”*** And, you know what? I could probably get away with it too. And you know why? Because, ***“well, he’s the priest.”*** Or I can go in like this: ***“yeh, you know, I’m not that comfortable here, but this is where God has placed me.”*** Whether it’s a hospital, nursing home, a Confirmation class, or just some regular meeting that I don’t feel like attending, sometimes I just have to remember the words of my Mom, ***“at least act like you’re happy. Do it with a joyful spirit.”*** You see, I can give ‘em the bill or not.
2. I think, also, about married couples: I’ve witnessed my own family members having hard moments in marriage. They have taught me what it means to go through conflict, hurt, and misunderstanding in a way that is fair and based in love. Couples, in walking the daily walk, can give each other the bill too. It’s the difference between just ***“putting up with each other’s weaknesses and getting by,”*** and remembering, ***“God brought us***

together. This is an awesome vocation. Yeh, we're gonna have those moments when it's hard, but we have to remember why we said yes to this."

3. Here's another one. We're all somebody's children. All of us. And, while no relationship between parent and child is perfect, we give each other the bill there too sometimes. I think about children who lovingly help out around the home when their parents need them to, because they know how loved they are and they want to love in return. I've also seen children (in my own family and in others) do what their parents ask with a negative, complaining attitude: help with the dishes, pick up your brother from school, clean your room, take out the garbage. As kids, we all give our parents the bill along the way—the people who gave us pretty much everything that we have. (Pause) Oh, and parents give their kids the bill too. Yeh, sure they do sometimes. You spend your child's whole life raising them, caring for them, working to make the money that you need to "do for" them. Then, all of a sudden, they're grown up, and you want them to go this way—but they go that way. And you're faced again with an attitude choice: let them go or give them the bill.

We shouldn't give each other the bill, especially in our families.

4. One more. (I'm sorry. We're almost done!) This may not seem directly related to "doing good for someone else," but you'll get the point. (Pause) Forgiveness. Now, I may be wrong, but when you forgive someone, you're either gonna do it or you're not. There's no such thing as partial forgiveness. For it to be forgiveness, it must be complete. Here's what I mean. It's the difference between: "*oh, I forgive you, you no good, low down, so and so...*" (Pause) And, "*yeh, this is hard, but I know I need to do it. God, help me to do it without any strings attached.*"

(Pause)

It's not just about whether or not we help one another. It's about how we go about it. It's all about attitude. It's not just about, "***can we do it?***" but "***can we do it without resentment?***"

It has been said that, "***each of us only has half a cross to bear in life.***" You know what that means. It means that, along the way, we choose to look to the person next to us and help them carry their cross. And whether we feel like we're bearing half of it or all of it, the bill should be the same—zero.

"If you're gonna help someone carry their cross, don't give them the bill."