

**Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity**  
**November 11, 2018**  
**Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass**  
**of the**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**Mark 12:38-44**

Because Jesus is God, He is able to judge the motives of our actions; He is able to read our hearts. Therefore, He knew in the Gospel that we just heard that the scribes were concerned with their status and that their prayers were pretentious. He knew, as well, that the widow who gave only a penny to the Temple's treasury had put in all she had, her whole living. He was able not only to observe people's action, but also to see inside their souls.

Because we are not God and we do not have the same capacity to see into the heart of men, we must be careful in this particular instance not to follow Jesus' example. We are not to pronounce a person's motivations for doing the things he does, nor can we know if our neighbors are giving to God to puff themselves up or if they are truly altruistic. As mere mortals without the Divine capacity for judgment, we must content ourselves with evaluating whether a person's actions are right or wrong, never presuming to tell others we know why they did what they did.

Hence, our Gospel this morning is meant not to convict others so much as it should convict us. Jesus' words today should lead us to examine our own consciences, in order that we discern our motivation for our acts of piety, for our prayers, and for our charitable giving. Jesus wants us to consider whether we do good for ourselves or to give God the honor and the glory. If we are doing it for ourselves, the Lord warns us that we will receive the greater condemnation. Indeed, it is possible for us to do good works our whole lives and go to hell for it because we had been doing it for ourselves all along. We might deceive our neighbors, but we can't deceive God; so it is up to us on this side of eternity to get our motives right, to approach God with a pure and generous heart.

This Gospel, then, is an indictment against vanity. The Lord demands that our internal disposition match our external actions and that, whatever concerns we have about appearances, we are intent first to meet God's approval. Of course, we want to be an example to others, but we don't do things in order to be seen by them; we do the right thing because it is right. We don't do good in order to be commended by others; we do good to be commended by God.

Since this is the case, and because our goal is heaven, each of us ought to take an inventory as to why we do the things we do. If it is for God, we will find that we can better trust ourselves to do the right thing in every circumstance, even if it means we come out humbled on the other side, yes, even if doing the right thing means we are humiliated. This calculus has life and death consequences, not just for our individual souls, but for the health and welfare of our fellowmen. If we want to get to heaven, and if we want others to have the chance to get there, too, then our first concern must be that our actions meet with God's approval, not with our own or our neighbor's commendation.

I bring this to you with a heavy heart, because today is the one-hundredth anniversary of the end of World War I, a senseless conflict that took the lives of about ten million soldiers and, when we count the flu epidemic that was the direct result of the war, more than fifty million civilian deaths world-wide. We are still living with the consequences of this tragedy, which include, but are not limited to, the dictatorship

of relativism, the demographic crisis in the West, the war between the sexes, and the ascendancy of art that is not artistic. Our culture's descent into madness did not begin with this war, but our willingness to wage it set in motion forces we haven't been able to contain, nor will we contain them short of a massive spiritual renewal grounded in Catholic Truth.

World War I and its rotten fruit are relevant to today's Gospel because all those lives were lost for the sake of vanity. It is indisputable historically that the great powers went to war in 1914 to save face, not to give glory to God, but in order that they would not appear weak. The lives of a generation of young men on both sides were sacrificed to win an absurd game of one-upmanship, and then we entered the conflict, having been promised we'd stay out of it, because the megalomania President Wilson imagined he could form a new world order out of the ashes. Well, we got a new world order, all right, and it looks a lot more like disorder than the utopia our Princeton man proposed. The whole thing could have been avoided, all the death and destruction, all the collateral damage, if just one among the many world leaders involved had been willing to be humbled, if just one of them had been able to set vanity aside and seek God's commendation instead of men's.

After the war began, the vanity became magnified more and more. As our Holy Father Benedict XV pleaded with the nations to stop slaughtering each other, the generals sent countless boys to walk completely exposed into machine-gun fire, because, they said, it was the manly thing to do. Officers wore their swords in combat, enabling enemy snipers to more easily identify them. Ever wonder why Germany ended up with an Austrian corporal as their Fuhrer? All the officers were dead. The examples of vanity and the consequences are too numerous to enumerate. Suffice it to say that the bad example set at the outset by the Kaiser and the Czar was followed to the letter, with hardly an exception.

But there was one. As blood lust born of vanity animated the peoples of the earth, the Emperor of Austria-Hungary stood apart from his contemporaries. Blessed Karl of Austria, beatified by St. John Paul II in 2004, came to the throne in the middle of the war, in late 1916. Almost immediately he began working for peace, in concert with Pope Benedict XV. Willing to cede territory and even restructure the empire along federalist lines, his appeals fell on deaf ears and the carnage continued for two more years. The thanks he got for his efforts for peace was his effective deposition, the reason most of you here have never heard of him.

But he is a saint of God's Church, and thus he is an effective intercessor on our behalf as together we confront the vanities and barbarities of the modern world. I commend him to you, especially if you are concerned, as I am, about the direction the world is headed. May he pray for justice and may he pray for peace. But may he pray, first, that our vanities do not blind us to the necessity of both those goods.

My point is that vanity is deadly, and not just for the soul. If we want our lives to reflect the wreckage that is the common heritage of World War I, then vanity will do. But if we want a heritage that is ever new, we can begin by humbling ourselves before both God and man and not expect to get recognized for it until the Last Day, when all the secrets of all our hearts will be revealed.