

Homily for July 25, 2010 (17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time)  
*Genesis 18:20-32; Colossians 2:12-14; Luke 11:1-13*  
Solanus Casey Center & St. Bonaventure Chapel, Detroit

### Pilgrims and Porters

Two friars, Br. Christopher and Br. Ernest, were on pilgrimage to a shrine. As they rounded a bend in the road, they came upon a beautiful and finely dressed young woman who had stopped before a large mud puddle that was in her way. She turned toward them plaintively. It was clear that there was no way she could cross the water without muddying her shoes and ruining her shoes and clothes.

Without saying a word, Br. Christopher picked her up in his arms and carried her across the puddle. He then gently placed her down and, with a bow and a slight smile, continued on his way.

Br. Ernest first stood speechless before the puddle then shook his head, made his way through, and followed his brother up the road, eventually catching up with him. They continued for some time in silence with Br. Ernest occasionally shaking his head and saying something under his breath.

Finally, Br. Christopher asked, “Ernest, what’s your problem?”

“My problem?” Ernest protested, “I think it’s more like *your* problem!”

“What do you mean?”

“Why did you pick up that beautiful woman? What about our vows? Didn’t our Novice Master, Fr. Prudentius, warn us against the near occasions of sin?”

“You saw it as a near occasion of sin, Ernest,” Br. Christopher said, “but to me it was a near occasion of grace. Besides, I put the lady down on the other side of the puddle. Why are you still carrying her?”

In the middle of a city where thousands of abandoned and sagging houses are an architectural metaphor for decades of economic decline, racial division, social dysfunction, and political corruption, this is a place where people come to become unburdened. In the midst of the Great Depression, people came to Fr. Solanus Casey and the other Capuchin friars, as well as our partners in ministry, for soup and solace, help and hope. Today in the painfully lingering wake of the Great Recession, people continue to come—for healing, forgiveness, counsel, peace...and yes, still for food.

Eight decades ago, people entered through the ponderous wooden doors of St. Bonaventure Monastery. Today many pass through the Creation Garden and enter the Solanus Casey Center where they encounter two glass doors with three simple words: *Ask, Seek, Knock*. Providentially, they are based on today’s gospel reading where Jesus tells his disciples: “Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened for you.”

The buildings and grounds are different but the mission hasn't changed. For many, this place is where God can take them to the other side of the mud puddle.

Fr. Solanus twice came to St. Bonaventure's as a pilgrim. The first time, when he was a novice, he was in the early stages of his vocational journey. He came here as a searcher to discover if God was indeed calling him to life as a Capuchin. Years later he returned. Because of his academic struggles he had been ordained a simplex priest, one who could say Mass only in private and who could not preach doctrinal sermons or hear confessions. In a way Solanus, now a friar and a priest, came back to Detroit looking for his place or role in the community.

A porter's basic job description is pretty simple: answer the door and help people to carry their stuff. It was as porter, however, that God chose to use Solanus as an instrument of grace. He may have been limited in how he could celebrate the Mass but he wonderfully shared with people the bread of compassion and the cup of hope as he ministered to them at the door of the Monastery and enrolled countless thousands in the Seraphic Mass Association. He may not have been able to preach like other priests, but he broke open the word of God to those he counseled. He may not have been able to hear confessions but that didn't stop people from coming to him to share their sorrows, searching, sickness, and sins.

Fr. Solanus Casey invited people to trust in the timeless mercy, compassion, and power of God. He urged them to approach God with the same faithful audacity that we witnessed in Abraham's encounter with God in our first reading; and to "Thank God ahead of time" for the good that God in his providence would do. People came with burdens and they left with blessings. Some came through the mud and even found a miracle. They came as pilgrims and were invited to also become porters, opening doors for others and lightening their loads.

As it was in the 1930's so it is today. God invites every person that enters this place to reflect on those three simple words engraved on the glass doors that lead into the Solanus Center: *Ask, Seek, and Knock*.

- As we walk past the statues of those men and women who embodied the Beatitudes and consider the life of Fr. Solanus, *God shows us the richness of what we can receive if we ask the right questions.*
- As we walk past the glass etchings of the saints and the tiles that call us to embrace the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy, *God shows us what we can find if we are searching for the right things.*
- As we come to the tomb of Fr. Solanus, to the confessionals, and to the healing services and lay our burdens there, *God shows us the new life that can open up for us if we knock persistently on the right doors.*

*Ask, Seek, Knock.* Thank God ahead of time. Be both pilgrim and porter. Christ gave that gift and mission to Ven. Solanus Casey. He gives it to us today. +