

## 080909 HOW MUCH TIME DO ANY OF US HAVE?

(This homily was preached by Msgr. McHenry three years ago at Saint Anthony's.  
He had the week off from preaching this past Sunday.)

Recently I received an email with an attachment. The attachment was a short video of a university scene. An examination was underway and the proctor was seated at the desk in the front of the classroom and was monitoring the students taking the test. The setting for the scene was New Zealand. With one minute to go the proctor announced that there was just one more minute to complete the test. One student turned his paper over, took out a lottery ticket and began to use the tip of his pen to erase the coating hiding the winning number. The proctor then called, "Time. Put your pens down and bring up your papers." The students filed forward but the student working on the lottery ticket was pretty intent on what he was doing. Suddenly he realized that he was the last one in the room. He put his pen in his pocket, picked up his paper and approached the proctor's desk. As he did so the proctor said, "You did not put your pen down when I called 'Time' so you failed." The student looked shocked and said to the proctor, "Do you have any idea who I am?" The proctor, with his glasses slid slightly down his nose looked over the top of his glasses and sniffed, "I have not the faintest idea." The student said, "Good!" Picked up half the pile of papers, slid his test into the middle and plopped the rest on top. "See you later!"

We love stories like that where the little guy wins over the system. And that line resonates in our ears. "Do you have any idea who I am?" Identity. I sometimes get some quirky thoughts and so recently I decided to figure out how many days it has been since I was given birth. I did the math, 365 days time so many years and so forth. The number turns out to be 21,670 days. Then I calculated what the number would be if I lived to be the average age for men in our country, over 76 years. That number was 27,760. That would mean that I still have about 6000 days left on earth. Of course, my dad died when he was 64 not 76 and my grandfather lived into his 90's or I could get hit by a bus tomorrow. But just taking the numbers at face value it means that I have lived about 80% of my life thus far and have about 20% to go.

Am I who the Lord wants me to be? Look at all the days He has given me. Are there still things He wants me to do? Changes I must make? What does God's Word say to us today about any of this?

- 1) Elijah is a prophet in Israel during the reign of King Ahaz and he has chosen to speak truth to power. He is now paying a price for what he has done. King Ahaz is pursuing him to kill him and Elijah is fleeing. He comes to a tree and sits down in its shade. He is exhausted, afraid, hungry. And he prays. He prays for death. Today we might say that he was severely depressed. What happens? The Lord chooses not to act on his request for death. The Lord recognizes a moment of weakness when He sees one. The Lord instead sends someone (an angel of mercy) with food and encouragement. Someone to touch him and lift his spirits. But the person has to do this more than once. Finally, Elijah is strengthened and his spirit renewed and he resumes the journey and arrives at his destination where he can again be the prophet, precisely who the Lord wants him to be. BUT. Elijah accepts what is given—the food, the rest, the encouragement, the support. He receives the offer of help. He receives the gift. He lets it in and does not push it away. He

does not stay down but fights through. And as a result becomes again the prophet.

- 2) Saint Paul writes to the Christians at Ephesus because he has heard some reports about some of the fighting and bickering that is going on. He gives them counsel and tells them not to give in to a spirit of bitterness. He even says that such a spirit saddens the very Spirit of God. There is no bitterness or rage or cynicism in God. None in Jesus. None in the kingdom. What there is is kindness and compassion and forgiveness. Is there anyone here who thinks that it is not very difficult to forgive? Do we think that it is easy for God to forgive? God created all that is and created us with the gift of freedom. Do you think it is easy for God to see us misuse our freedom, hurt ourselves or others and still easily forgive us? It is God's choice but that doesn't mean it is easy. It is a choice that lies before us. It is of God to live and act this way. But if I can embrace forgiveness and let go of my bitterness will I not then become the person that God has always wanted me to be?
- 3) Jesus tells the crowds around him that they should stop murmuring and complaining. Stop murmuring and complaining? I love to murmur and complain. I am good at these things. I have raised them to an art form. Give them up? Why would I want to do that? Why does Jesus tell us to do that? Because when we murmur and complain we are focusing on what is not, on what is missing, on what is wrong. We can notice these things but the complaining or the murmuring? Jesus tells us to resist the temptation to give in to the constant bickering. That is not what we have received from him. These things do not help us or sustain us or nourish us in any way even though we may like them. They are not real nourishment. Jesus is real nourishment? What do I mean? At the level of what we need the most, Jesus feeds us. We are affirmed. We are wanted. We are appreciated. We are loved. Jesus believes in us even when we don't believe in ourselves. That is what He gives us; this is what Jesus offers us. That is what truly nourishes and sustains us. And that is why He is Bread. And that is why He calls himself Bread, the very Bread of Life.

That is His identity. That is who He is. And folks, that is who I am. That is my identity too. And it is your identity as well. To be good bread. To give people what they truly need—not what they deserve or what they can pretty much get from anyone else. To nourish them by the way we live our lives. How many days do you think you have left in order to become the person the Lord knows you can be? What do you need to do to become good bread for people? I know that none of us wants to go to God while we are in a spirit of hopelessness or while we are angry and bitter and cynical and carping. What, then, has to change? How much time do I have? Perhaps I had better do it now.