

ORDINARY TIME FOURTH SUNDAY YEAR A 2011 HOMILY

(Zephaniah 2: 3, 3: 12-13; 1 Corinthians 1: 26-31; Matthew 5: 1-12a – Beatitudes)

BLESSED ARE THE BORING

Here is a description of a new television drama that appeared recently on Showtime. “The series follows the dysfunctional family of Frank Gallagher, a single father of six children. While he spends his days drunk, his kids learn how to take care of themselves.” The description goes on to speak of some of the different characters. The oldest daughter is a young woman and she is really the Parent of the family. She is the focus of attention to a great extent because of her promiscuity. Her two teenage brothers “learn to take care of themselves” largely, it seems, by sexual experimentation and doing drugs. One of the brothers is straight and the other is not. The series is said to be a serious examination of poverty among troubled families in modern America. There are several other new TV series that have started lately which have similar themes. At least one of these shows actually uses underage actors in sex scenes. [See “shameless” article in [Wikipedia](#).]

Here is an interesting contrast of another kind of program altogether. “*The Archers* has focused for six decades on the mostly uneventful lives in an English farming community. The plots often center on tractor parts, crop rotation, and hay thefts. And it airs on the radio! Despite the sedate pace and unglamorous setting, 5 million listeners a week in Britain – and others throughout the world via the Internet – follow the everyday travails of the landowning Archers, the working-class Grundys, and their [various] neighbors in the fictional village of Ambridge. Does that cow have mastitis? How is lambing season going? And how is octogenarian Peggy Archer coming along with her computer lessons? Inga McVicar, who writes the blog *Pondering the Archers*, remembers the first time she heard the show. ‘It wasn’t a particularly exciting episode,’ she said. ‘But there was just something warm and inviting about it.’” (See the *Columbus Dispatch*, January 14, pp. D 1-2.)

Today our Gospel reading from St. Matthew is the Beatitudes. This passage ushers us into Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount which will supply us with gospel readings for the next several Sundays. The Beatitudes are the heart of the Sermon on the Mount and they tell us that the people who will be blessed or happy are those society considers to be unhappy or even wretched. The poor in spirit, the sorrowing, the meek and the lowly, the peacemakers, the folks who suffer for doing the right thing – these are the ones who will be truly blessed and happy. These are the ones who have seen through the illusion of wealth and power and sinful pleasure and have come to depend on God. Those who live out the Beatitudes are certain that they need God. But the culture may consider them dull or boring or even (God forbid!) inexperienced. They may also be looked upon as naïve or no fun.

It was fascinating for me to read about the British radio program called *The Archers*. I had never heard of it before. Its popularity shows that boring is cool. You might as well say that real life is interesting – more interesting than sensational shows that claim to be about reality but are mostly just using poverty and troubled family situations to titillate the viewers. Now, believe me, I am no prude. And I could see making a serious movie or television show about dysfunctional families – including sexual dysfunction. But to be real, such dramas would need to look at the whole person and not just the seamier side of

human existence. It is insulting to poor people and to troubled families to present them as degenerates. Shows such as the one described in Wikipedia are the natural evolution of so-called “reality” shows which are ultimately about nothing except a group of egocentric and selfish folks who have no depth. In the end, it’s this so-called “reality” that is as boring as Hell – literally!

So why is *The Archers* so popular? It’s a good question. The only answer is that the show is interesting as all get out because it mirrors ordinary life. From a theological and biblical perspective, ordinary life is the only life worth living. As the second reading (from our patron St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians) reminds us (and I paraphrase it a little): “God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and the despised of the world, those who [seemingly] count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who [think they] are something.” And the Beatitudes remind us of the virtue of humility which is praised in today’s first reading from the prophet Zephaniah: “[the humble and lowly]”, the prophet says, “shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; they shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them.” The mention of flocks brings to mind the Archer family who are, of course, an English farming family.

The Archers are interesting precisely because you are interesting in your ordinary lives of being human and, by God’s grace, of being Christian. Real life is interesting because the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the virtues and the divine mercy, are all there is. If we let God into our lives to forgive us and to love us into conversion and holiness, this is interesting. The lives of the saints are interesting. Jesus Christ, the most humble human being to walk the earth, is fascinating. When you come down to it, goodness is exciting. Family life is exciting. A few years ago, the Klinger family discovered where we came from in Germany in the 1840s. One of my uncles and his wife and daughter went over to the town near Nurnberg in Bavaria where they found Klinger families that had lived on the same farm for hundreds of years. They were still working it and they were interesting.

I don’t know what to tell you about television – except to be very careful what you watch and especially what you let your children watch. But if you want excitement, you’ll find it easily because the most interesting show is your family. I am not talking about the perfect family. If you think you have one of them, you’re probably crazy. And I am not talking just about the so-called traditional family of Mom and Dad and kids – although that has a heck of a lot to recommend it. There are holy families where there is only one parent or shared parenting or blended families and so forth. Regardless of what kind of family you have, don’t be afraid to make it a holy family. If your neighbors think you’re boring, rejoice, as Jesus tells us in today’s gospel, because you are truly blessed. It is the seemingly dull families that are the happiest and thus the most fascinating. I say: Blessed are the boring! Degenerate is not interesting – at least not for long. More than likely, your family is as good as it gets. And as the gospel says, “be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”