

**Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez for the
Diocese of St. Augustine Catholic Women's Conference
Saturday, August 10, 2013
Wyndham Jacksonville Riverwalk**

**Feast of St. Lawrence
2 COR 9:6-10, JN 12:24-26**

Walking in Rome I found a church near Via del Corso I looked up and observed: why was there a “gridiron” on the top door. The name of the church was St. Lawrence, Martyr and Deacon. Lawrence assisted Pope Sixtus II and during the persecution of Valerian (250), Lawrence was put to death. Asked to submit the church’s property – Deacon Lawrence pointed to a crowd of poor people: Here are the treasures of the church. Lawrence was burned to death on a gridiron!!

God Loves a Cheerful Giver

Last Sunday we heard Jesus’ Parable on greed! A friend reminds me of a gripping passage in Charlotte Bronte’s marvelous novel *Jane Eyre*:

By age 18 Jane has already suffered much humiliation and rejection, but this suffering has given her a purity and wisdom that quite contrast the attitude of her employer, the worldly-wise Mr. Rochester. He too, has suffered much, but his suffering has instead made him bitter. One evening Mr. Rochester says to Jane, “When I was your age, fate dealt me a blow. And since happiness has denied me, I’ve a right to get pleasure instead. And I will get it, cost what it may.” To this Jane replies very simply, “Then you’ll degenerate still more.”

I’ve a right to get pleasure: we should be grateful to a novelist who unmasks in this way, one of our own fundamental drives, one which, if we obey it blindly, is guaranteed to make us too “degenerate still more.” Is this not precisely the attitude of the rich man in the gospel, who in his great satisfaction with himself exclaims: “Now, my soul, you have so many good things stored up for many years. Rest, eat, drink, be merry!” You see how this man has actually persuaded himself that he has won the battle against time and mortality. His accumulated possessions were so towering that he has come to identify the worth of his person, of his very soul, with the sheer material bulk of what he owned. In a very grotesque manner, he has become what he has. But God said to him, “You fool,” We are indeed a fool when we give more effort to having than to being by developing our rich potential. With St. Lawrence, Paul says God loves a cheerful giver!

As St. Frances of Assisi says, there is such joy in giving. Practicing love is essentially giving of ourselves... We learn in today’s Gospel: if a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Jesus was a lover of nature and he marvels at the mystery of fertility. A seed that dies gives fruit to a new and greater outcome. This saying is in miniature a symbol of Jesus’ entire life. When we choose the way of service, we put aside many other possible alternatives and priorities, but caring for others especially the needy, multiplies the good blessings impacting many lives including our own. There is such joy in serving!

A couple of weeks ago, while on vacation with my immediate family, my 90 year old mother Estrella, my sister, Marty and brother Carlos and their beautiful family. I also read Sister Thomas Joseph McGoldrick's book, *Beyond the Call: the Legacy of Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine*. Bishop Verot asked the Sisters to come from France especially to serve the black children and their families. The sisters have been caring for us all for more than 150 years in Florida – some were even arrested by bullies in government for educating blacks. The sisters were not properly respected by some in authority; they did not respect their dignity. And yet they served the church faithfully and excelled with a passion for service – bringing neighbors close to neighbors – and neighbors to God. The Sisters of St. Joseph remarkable story reveals the genius of women in serving humankind.

The Eucharist makes present the gift of the Servant who loves us. What he gives us is his own person to the extreme: body, blood, soul and divinity. It is indeed a “Gift of the finest wheat.” This sacrament of unity enables us to increase our togetherness in the synergy by participating in the Communion of the Holy Spirit. Our worship enables us to love, to serve and to care in the name of Christ.