

Dear Parishioners,

Have you ever heard of Sir Willy Bubenik? I certainly have. He died on February 9, 2004 in Nigeria. Apparently he was a very wealthy engineer and business man who had a most philanthropic heart. I received an e-mail from a priest in Nigeria telling me that I am to be a beneficiary of his will and that I am to receive (in U.S. dollars) \$750,000.00.

Naturally several different thoughts crossed my mind, the first being this must be some kind of hoax. So, I went to Google.com and sure enough there is a Sir Willy Bubenik fraud being perpetuated. So, my days of wealth and prosperity are still far off in some deep dark future that can only be imagined, which is fine by me because money scares me to death.

Oh but wouldn't it be nice to receive free money from a complete stranger who wants nothing but to give it all away to people who appear to be charitable? You do understand that if I were to receive that money it would all be given away, don't you? Oh, just think of all the hungry people who could eat because I fed them. Think of all the poor school children who could learn because I provided money for schools to buy books and to pay teachers a just salary. Of course the Rockford Diocese would praise me because of all the money I would give them. Gosh, with just these few charitable ideas there would be no money left over for me, but oh the glory of my generosity...

I didn't even get a single penny of Sir Willy's fortune and I never will. Yet I am blinded by its power. For a few short minutes I felt the dread of what my family would feel about me if I had that much money. I also thought about how wonderful it would be to pay off my car and continue to save money so that the next time I buy one I wouldn't have to take out a loan. My mind was racing in a million different directions until I decided to go to Google.com, then I actually found myself laughing that the joke was on me. At the same time I felt relieved that my life is not going to be changed by this vast fortune.

Yet something deep inside me was awakened by the drama of this hoax. How sad it is that a good man's name is being used to defraud people of their own money (yes this is a money making scheme perpetrated by very greedy people). How sad it is to know that in Africa, a continent besieged by the AIDS epidemic, unbelievable poverty, ethnic cleansing, and political scandal, all of these horrors will continue as I laugh off this hoax. I am not going to be impacted by this fraud in the least, but millions of people are going to continue suffering at the hands of greedy, immoral people who just want money.

While it is impossible for me to personally make life better for the people of Africa, it is important for me to pay attention to what was awakened inside of me. What is it God is trying to say in this moment? What would God want me to say to you? I think God is telling me that he is the savior of the world, the master of the universe. He wants me to keep my eyes open to his loving presence in my life and in the world. He wants me to open my eyes and my heart to realize that I am not the center of the universe. As hard as this might seem to be, it's not "all about me."

As we go about our preparations for celebrating Christmas and as we experience all the stress and drama of shopping, cleaning, wrapping presents, going to Christmas programs, and deciding where we will go to celebrate Christmas we have these weeks of Advent. Let them remind us of the truth that Christmas is about the birth of the Christ-child to a family that was very poor and homeless, and whose lives were threatened by the elements as well as their king. This is the world the Messiah was born into: a world of corruption, greed, profound evil everywhere. This is the world he came to save. In his life Jesus did this first by touching one soul at a time, and ultimately he gave every soul the possibility of salvation by dying for our sins.

In Advent we come to realize that we are still being touched one soul at a time, that we who are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, are given the task of bringing the light of his love to this world now. We make a beginning by having something deep inside of us awakened. This is not easy. Awakenings are often painful, but they always reveal the beauty and the glory of God's love at work in our lives.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel