

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

[Samuel Hakeem](#)

Lectionary 150:

Sir 35:12-14, 16-18
Ps 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23
2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

Possible preaching themes:

- Presumption, especially our own righteousness, runs the risk of blinding us to our need for God. Humbly acknowledging our need for God's mercy opens us to growth in holiness.
- In striving for holiness, we can get caught in a spirit of individualism, reducing faith to a personal reality. Instead of "running the race" of faith alone, we must support one another on our journey into God's reign.

Possible scientific resources:

- **On presumptions:** scientists set out to prove their presumption that light waves travel through a "luminiferous ether." Their experiment found no evidence of ether, but they accidentally discovered that the speed of light is constant, which revolutionized physics.
 - Background and history:
<https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/200711/physicshistory.cfm>
 - A more detailed explanation of the experiment and its significance to physics:
<https://www.britannica.com/science/light/The-Michelson-Morley-experiment>
 - Michelson and Morley's original article on the topic
<https://history.aip.org/exhibits/gap/PDF/michelson.pdf>
- **On running:** The presence of other racers affects both pacing and exertion.
 - "The Science of Racing against Opponents: Affordance Competition and the Regulation of Exercise Intensity in Head-to-Head Competition"
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fphys.2017.00118/full>
 - "The Science Behind Competition and Winning in Athletics: Using World-Level Competition Data to Explore Pacing and Tactics"
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fspor.2019.00011/full>

Homily outline:

About waves

- For millennia, humans have stood on the water's edge and observed the motion of waves. But what exactly is a wave?
 - Not an independent object, separate from but rather the motion of the water.
- Similarly, sound is nothing more than waves propagating through air;
 - a "sound wave" is the motion of air particles pushing together and relaxing, just like ocean waves crashing on the shore.
- In the 19th century James Clarke Maxwell proved that light, too, was a wave.
 - An obvious question followed: a wave of what? What is being pushed and relaxed in order to create light waves?
 - It was presumed that a substance called "luminiferous ether" existed everywhere where light could travel:
 - It *had* to exist because waves travel through substances.
 - What were its properties?
 - How could it be discovered, proven to exist?
- Albert A. Michelson and Edward W. Morley developed an extremely sensitive contraption, capable of proving the existence of the luminiferous ether:
 - the earth travels around the sun at a very fast speed;
 - a light wave traveling in the same direction as the earth should be moving much more quickly than a light wave traveling in a different direction;
 - if they could show that to be true, they could prove the existence of the luminiferous ether.
- The results of the experiment were confusing:
 - no change in speed was detected, regardless of the direction the light waves traveled.
- Disappointed and deflated, Michelson and Morley published their results—or lack thereof—in a paper.
 - This presumed failure became one of the most significant, accidental discoveries of modern physics: light always moves at a constant speed
 - a fact which revolutionized physics,
 - became central to Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity,
 - now called "the most famous 'null' result in physics."
- Presumption of the existence of ether and the disappointment of perceived failure, inhibited Michelson and Morley from realizing the significance of their discovery!

Gospel presumptions

- Presumption in physics may delay discovery. Presumption in our faith lives is of greater concern.
- The Pharisee in today's Gospel is certain of his own goodness, even thankful for it:
 - he follows the religious law, *unlike the others*, even surpassing expectations,
 - he's proud of who he is, clearly better than others,
 - he's convinced of his own righteousness.
- The tax collector has no reason for boasting:
 - he is a sinful man and knows it,

- he humbly acknowledges his sin to God,
 - he recognizes his need for God’s mercy.
- The tax collector goes home justified.

Unexpected grace

- Our presumptions allow us to affirm that we are “good enough”:
 - we make it to Mass,
 - we are kind to others,
 - we are charitable and give to the poor,
 - we are better than a lot of people, so will surely get to heaven!
- Yet, we are all flawed and sinful, needing to grow in multiple ways.
- Recognizing that reality and our lack of progress can be disappointing—like Michelson and Morley searching for the ether.
 - But what looks to us like a “null” result is often God’s undiscovered mercy and grace.

Good news:

- Jesus redeemed us from our sinfulness, revealing divine mercy and inviting us grow in holiness!
 - There is no spiritual contraption to measure whether or not we have crossed that special threshold of “good enough.”
- Holiness is a lifelong relationship with the living God,
 - alternately admitting our fault
 - opening ourselves to new opportunities for receiving mercy
 - and reentering the race with Paul toward that crown of righteousness.
- Mass can be a tax collector moment for us:
 - we acknowledge our sins and weakness
 - Lord, have mercy
 - Forgive us our trespasses
 - Lamb of God have mercy on us
 - Lord I am not worthy.
- The Father’s response?
 - “Take and eat; receive my Son, crucified for you; become like Him: holy, filled with grace.”
- Presuming that we are good enough disables our individual and communal encounters with God’s mercy.
 - We bow low, acknowledging our need for mercy.
 - But we do not do this alone
- We are all in this race together
 - urging each other on through word and example in this kingdom marathon.
 - Just like Michelson and Morley needed the scientific community to open their eyes to their contribution
 - We too need faith communities to open our eyes to new possibilities in grace.
- No matter what our effort, it is always outstripped by God’s lavish mercy and love,
 - revealed in God’s abiding Spirit, who sets the pace for us to run this holy race.

Tags: light waves, mercy, physics, presumptions

About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.