

If you were to ask the average Lutheran what's the major difference between the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Churches, I bet most would respond the Pope or Mary. Bottom line, there is much more that is very significant, but these are probably the two most visible things that people see. And while acknowledging our differences, I would be gravely remiss if I did not share that two of our closest ministry partners are Father Andy at Little Flower and Father Bill at Our Lady of Peace. Those ties are made possible by the witness of Pope John XXIII, who convened the second Vatican Council half a century ago, inviting people of faith to celebrate what they shared in common, rather than fighting over their differences. We thank God for that renewal.

And so Lutherans publicly acknowledge and affirm the ministry of the Holy Father as one who can lead and speak publicly for the faith. We don't accept all the theology that our Roman sisters and brothers do, but we clearly understand the role and purpose of our bishops in leading the church.

And if the Pope was a problem for some, Mary was a problem for many more folks. And I'll bet that there are more than a few of you here today who grew up in the Protestant/Lutheran church who never thought you'd see Mary's day celebrated in our church. But here it is. And like with the Pope we need to say it as clearly as possible, that while we celebrate the richness of this day, we in no way can accept 99% of the Roman theology related to Mary. And here's the difference. Our theology is based on the Scriptural witness. Roman theology draws on the Bible and Tradition. And it's that tradition that informs almost all of their church's teaching about Mary. Our understanding is very simple: Mary was a humble, poor peasant girl that God used to share the gift of Jesus Christ. Once again as God did on so many different occasions, God acted in the most unexpected way with the most unexpected person. And so Mary shared that gift in Bethlehem; she raised that child; and she stood by his execution chamber as he was killed. And so the point of this day for confessional Christians, Lutherans?

It is with some degree of regularity that someone usually catches me to raise concerns that we talk too much about making a commitment to Christ here. They're not happy that we talk about money and what we do and don't do with it. Oh, they like the baby Jesus and are happy to share "gifts," but the bottom line is they don't want to hear anything that would impinge on their lifestyle. Because ultimately, their money is what defines who they are. It makes and breaks their relationships and their commitments. (By the way, this is what Luther called our idolatry). A little bit back, someone rather angrily told me that week in and week out the lessons and sermons were about money. And so we're at a teaching moment.

We don't pick the lessons...we share them in common with Christians around the world. And yes, they do often speak of money because that is one of the things Jesus talked about more than any other. (Commercial here: September 19 and 26 we have a two week Adult Forum entitled *Money and Faith: The Search for Enough*). My dear partner observed this last week that on three of the four Sundays he is preaching in this period, Jesus tells his followers to get rid of their possessions. Reality orientation. And that brings me to the point of this day.

This morning, our Gospel lesson is Mary's song. It begins Luke's Gospel and under rides everything else that Gospel will tell us. *What else did she say?* This is it my friends. God claims the poor. God prods the rich. God defines servant ministry. And if a congregation sees itself in any other identity, it has denied the faith.