

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – August 11, 2019
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If you have a home built before – say 1980 – the chances are that you have two living spaces – the living room and the den or family room. In the home where I grew up, for example, the living room is at the front of the house with formal furniture and nice carpeting and draperies. The den, on the other hand, is in the back of the house. That’s where the television is – along with more durable furniture and a more sturdy area rug. When I was growing up, we spent most of our time in the den. That was where we played as children, did homework, took naps on the couch. We may have called the front room the living room, but we actually lived in the den. Somewhere along the line – home designers decided that separate living rooms and family rooms were a waste of space. They combined the functions into what became known as the “great room.” Here a family did everything. It was the space where toys were played with – and often where those same toys resided when they were not promptly returned to their space. No one needs a formal living room when you can have such a wonderful, adaptable space. Yes, great rooms were perfect – with one tiny exception.

Usually on a dreary summer afternoon, when thunderstorms were threatening outside, we would all be gathered in the den. My brother would have GI Joes scattered about and I would be surrounded by Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars. My mother would be keeping an eye on dinner in the adjacent kitchen and folding laundry on the couch. The television would be blaring away. The house looked – as my mother would often say – like it was ready to walk. And then the dreaded sound was heard – the doorbell. Yes, at this moment, when the house was in complete disarray and there were toys and projects all over the floor, at this moment, some nice neighbor or friend from church had decided to pay us a visit. We would all go scampering – my brother and I to shove stuff into the bedrooms before we closed the doors, my mother to wipe down the bathroom, and then we would meet at the front of the house to answer the door. We would welcome our guest and sit in the living room and visit. Never mind that we hadn’t used that room since the pictures were taken on Christmas morning. We had the perfect space to entertain the surprise guest – someone who must have thought that we were just the perfect family – so neat and clean. After all, if the living room looked like this, surely the rest of the house is perfect as well. Yes, the living room saved us on so many occasions, that I often wondered how people with only great rooms actually lived. Did they keep it as neat as our living room? Did they entertain people in the chaos of our den? The architect that came up with the great

room idea probably made a fortune selling homes to single young couples without children – because no one with kids would actually touch one.

We are tempted to hear today's readings in the context of the formal living room. You never know the day or the hour, so you always need to have some space that's neat and clean – some space to present to Jesus when he rings the bell. We live our lives like this, don't we? No matter how much mess we have going on at work or at home or in our family or in the other relationships of our lives, we put on a good face before God. We show off our spiritual living room with its dainty furniture and designer look. Never mind that we visit that spiritual living room only once in a while. Because it is always ready to receive visitors, to receive Jesus, I feel like I'm prepared. The problem, of course, is that Jesus isn't really interested in visiting our squeaky clean front parlors – he wants to meet us where we really live – amidst the things that you enjoy, surrounded by the joys and sorrows, the excitement and frustration of daily life. No one can really get to know you in a stiff and formal setting. We really live in homes where meals are cooked and where laundry is waiting to be folded and where we'll get around to dusting that table in a day or so. That's the kind of life we need to bring to prayer. That's the spiritual preparation we need to do before the Son of Man comes. We need to be prepared to welcome Jesus into our actual living space – into our daily lives. Of course, if we do that, it means that we will have to clean things up a bit. If we invite Jesus into our place of employment, for example, we will have to put aside greed and self-interest and ambition in favor of charity and understanding. If we invite Jesus into our family, then we will have to put aside the tensions that can exist in our relationships in favor of love and forgiveness. If we invite Jesus into our minds, then we will have to banish the immoral thoughts in order to make room for his grace. In short, Jesus wants to dwell in the great room of our hearts – to spend time with us. Yes, he expects us to prepare for him – but the good news is that he is willing to work with us in the effort. His life is given to us in baptism, his gifts of wisdom and courage are imparted to us at confirmation, his mercy and compassion is lovingly poured out upon us in the sacrament of reconciliation, and his sustenance, his strength, his very self is given to us in the Eucharist. We do not labor alone. By faith, we prepare to receive the one who created us, the one who loves us. By faith, we are already in his presence.