

## Week 9

### PICK A NUMBER 638

*“For the measure you measure with will be measured back to you”*  
(Luke 6:38).

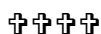
A child wrote to her pastor:

Dear Pastor,

I hear you say we should love our  
enemies. I am only six and don't have any  
yet. I hope to have some when I am seven.

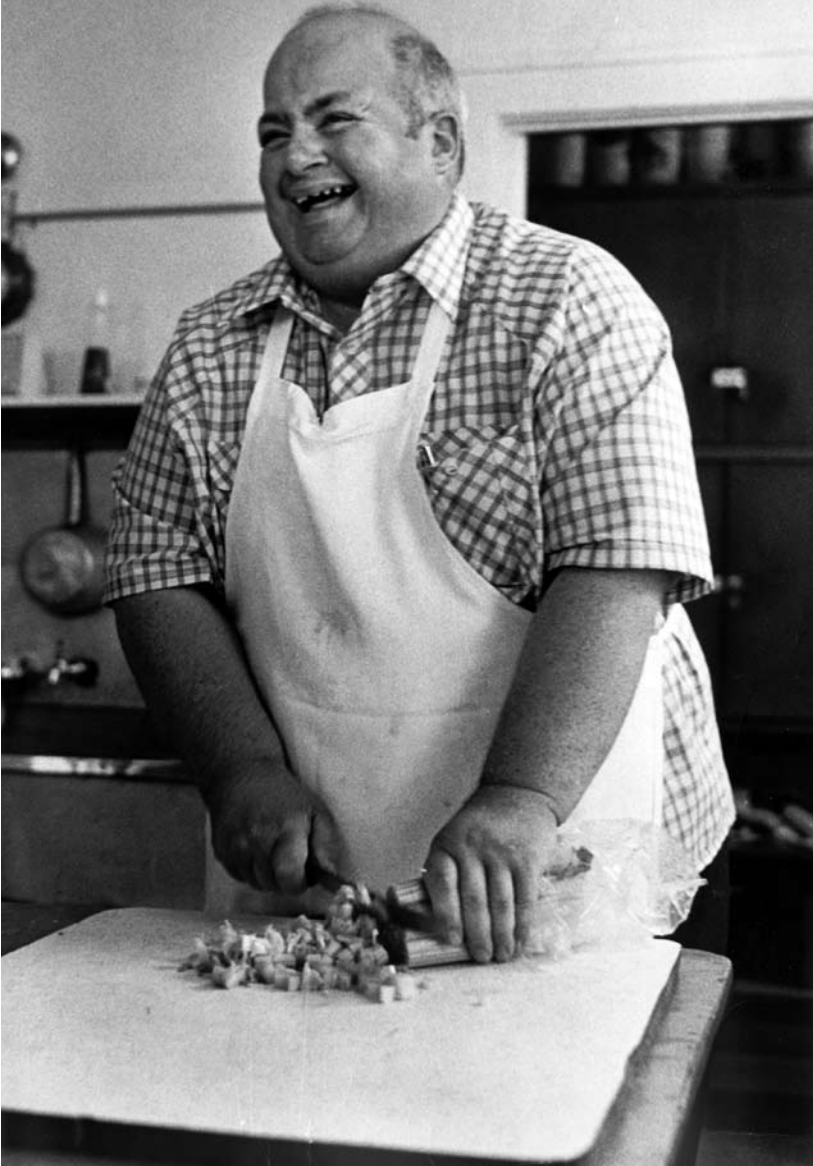
Love,  
Jennifer

Wouldn't it be nice if life stayed that easy? From the study of English literature years ago, I remember a line from a poem by Robert Burns: “Oh, would some power the Giver gives us, to see ourselves as others see us.” That could be kind of scary, but helpful in carrying the mantle of Christianity. When God measures us, he puts the tape around our hearts. That's what we are called to do.



A family was out at a rather fine restaurant and the young boy asked if he could say grace. They all bowed their heads and the boy prayed, “God is great. God is good. We thank him for the food and I hope Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. Amen.”

*Pick a Number*



*John Keyes, jovial as usual, is shown working in the kitchen of Port St. Vincent, Madison around the year 1975.*

A woman at the next table said loud enough for all to hear, "That's the trouble with this country today. Kids don't even know how to pray right. Imagine praying for ice cream!"

The boy was hurt and embarrassed.

A bit later an older gentleman from another table came by and said softly to him, "I know that God really liked your prayer and it's too bad that woman over there doesn't pray for ice cream once in a while. A little ice cream is good for the soul."

Later when ice cream was served, the boy just looked at it for a few moments, then picked it up and took it over to the woman and said, "I want you to have this. Ice cream is good for the soul and my soul is good already."

Jesus is always concerned about the good of our souls, and love is the best medicine we can give each other. "The measure you measure with will be measured back to you." As the Prayer of St. Francis says, "It is in giving that we receive."



Speaking of measurements, I had a friend some twenty years ago whom was well known to many of you as well—John Keyes. John was a huge man. I don't know what his measurement was, but I know how he measured others.

John dedicated his life to helping others, measuring all equally, not concerned about the shortcomings we all have. However, he did have a way of expressing concern about some of the possessions we own, especially if they were quite fancy or expensive, be it a new car, a large house, an expensive vacation. He was known to often say, "It sure is a far cry from the simple life of the Nazorean." This was never said in an offensive way, but in a way that made one think. John never owned or drove a car, didn't even possess a wallet, and usually had a running bill at floral shops for the floral gifts he was so good at sending. His life was not "A far cry from the simple life of the Nazorean."

## *Pick a Number*

In the 1970s, John was the energy—the light and the power that brought about Port St. Vincent, shelter for homeless men which to this day is doing a great service to the community of Madison. He had a dream of creating shelter for homeless women as well. His short life of 41 years ended before he could do so, but his dream did not end. His example of love and doing for others inspired so many that today there are four Elizabeth Seton houses for women.

John could always laugh at himself so I'm sure he would want me to tell this story. Back in those days, in most towns and cities, one would see a scale on the sidewalk outside of some businesses where you could stop and weigh yourself. As the story goes, one day John stepped on a scale. It went to a hundred, kept going, and came by a hundred again, and I think again, then stopping on 70 pounds. A mother and her daughter walking by stopped to look. The girl looked at the size of John, looked again at the scale pointing to 70 pounds and asked, "Mom, is he hollow?"

Perhaps John was. He had the largest capacity for love and compassion that I have ever known. Now, more than twenty years later, his work is still serving the needs of others.



In talking about how we measure others we sometimes use the expression, "You can't tell a book by its cover." I have another Port St. Vincent story and another ice cream story that applies.

A farm family was moving from the parish. They had a freezer full of food—whole chickens, other meats, jams, and jellies, etc. The wife asked if I could store the food and give it to Port St. Vincent as needed. I did and told John what was there as well as some plastic containers of ice cream, probably home-made. Sometime later he called and said it would be a good evening for the guys to have ice cream. So I took a couple gallons to them but was unable to stay and join them.

Later that evening my phone rang. It was Jacko, a big, strong, wonderful resident. Uncharacteristically he was very

upset. He said, "That was a dirty trick. It wasn't funny at all!" He had scooped out his ice cream, as did all the others, put on chocolate sauce and peanuts, took a big bite and immediately spit out the frozen lard. No, it wasn't funny. Fortunately for me, Jacko and the rest were very forgiving.

The following Christmas, as I was ready to leave Port St. Vincent, Jacko asked me to wait while he went to get something. He returned with a small jar full of pennies, nickels, and dimes. Jacko, poorer than any church mouse said, "Give this to a poor family." Jacko knew measurements.



In the Depression days of the early 1930s, Fiorello La Guardia, who later became a famous mayor of New York City, was the presiding judge at court when a man was brought in guilty of stealing a couple loaves of bread. He needed the bread to feed his hungry family. La Guardia said to him, "The law is the law; I must fine you ten dollars."

The man said, "I don't have any money."

La Guardia took ten dollars out of his pocket and put it in the large hat he wore. Then he said to the court bailiff, "Here's the money for the fine. Now, I am fining everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a city where a poor man must steal to feed his family. Collect the fines and give them to this man."

How do we measure others? How do we measure up to God's standard?