When an actor is typecast as a particular sort of character, it is very hard for them to get jobs which allow them to develop as another character. An example is Jean Stapleton who portrayed the character of Edith Bunker in the All in the Family series which was so popular a few years ago. Before her death last year, she mentioned how difficult it was to go to auditions for other kinds of roles. Her performance was once so iconic (and so convincing) that she was always “Edith” to others—and they couldn’t see beyond her one role.

Jesus is not only iconic – he’s often even pictured in icons as something quite differently than the Gospels portray him. The Letter to the Hebrews asserts that Jesus’ humanity makes him a perfect intercessor.

Some of the Icons of Jesus can make him unapproachable. If you have ever been to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in
Washington, D.C. you would have seen the fierce face of Jesus, one
whose eyes blaze and whose stare pierces you.

If you saw the pictures of Pope Francis doing Baptisms last week,
you saw the picture of the Last Judgment from the back wall of the
Sistine Chapel. Half of that scene shows people being cast into Hell, the
other side shows them being assisted into the glories of heaven. A
judging Jesus is a stern Lord indeed.

In many of the Christmas cards that I received, Jesus was portrayed
as a baby, being held by a loving mother and watched over by an
adoring father. Sometimes those scenes lead us to forget that Jesus grew
up!

Writing to Christian believers some 40 years after the death and
resurrection of our Lord, the author of Hebrews says much the same
thing. The tone of Hebrews suggests that there were some in that day
who questioned our Lord’s humanity. They had no problem in affirming
Jesus was the “Son of God”, but they could not wrap their minds around
our Savior being flesh and blood, someone who, according to our readings, had “become like his brothers and sisters in every respect.” Jesus, our high priest, came to be one with us, he walked our dusty roads, knew our human struggles, and died our death. Hebrews is telling us that Jesus is our intercessor. What does that mean? It means that Jesus offers us a way to be disciples.

Mary has been honored, and rightly so, as a model “intercessor.” As a mother, she cares for the poor and the lowly; she is always approachable and she never turns away from her child, regardless of what traps or confounds them.

Simeon saw fulfillment in a baby. Through the Spirit, Simeon sees the completion of God’s promises to his people—a “light of revelation to the nations.”

I want to return for a moment to a theme that I touched on two weeks ago: Why do people give up on “organized religion”? Why are there so many “believers but not belongers”? One reason is just plain
**apathy.** When things are going o.k., folks can be lulled into a sense of complacency. On the first Sundays after 9 – 11, Churches were simply packed to overflowing. We were all shocked by what had happened in our country, and in our loss, we turned to God. Following the Boston marathon bombing, …not so much. Have we simply become apathetic?

It is true that the scandals in the Church have contributed a great deal to the dissatisfaction on the part of the faithful. But I would bet that in many cases these horrors perpetrated on the part of some members of the institution are simply the “straw that broke the camels back”.

Who better to rely on than a God who has lived through the same sufferings, the same temptations, the same pains and the same joys as we have? He is a powerful intercessor because Christ has been there before us. The mystery of His having been made flesh consecrates human life.

- A child grows to appreciate the value of human love through the experience of being in a family.
• A spouse grows in love through the challenges and blessings that marriage affords over a lifetime.

• A Church “happens” as men and women are challenged to come together with people they have not chosen as friends and yet know that, in loving the other, they come to know more about what their love of God really means. They become aware…

But there is more. Where there is awareness, there needs to be action. Simeon, suddenly aware that he was in the presence of majesty, God’s anointed, reached out and held the infant Christ in his arms and blessed God. His awareness led to action, as Anna’s awareness led to praise.

Times are we come to an awareness of a need in another’s life, or the suffering of some lost soul, or the pain that is the measure of loneliness in a teenager or a brutal grief in a widow-- and we do nothing! We even say, “I feel for him” or “I feel so sorry for her.” But our feelings, our awareness, is all there is. From God’s perspective, awareness without action is the worse form of Christian indifference.
I’ll just say it: this apathy is a sin that clouds our best selves and keeps us from being God’s people and doing God’s work.

   Each time I come to the Altar, both word and Sacrament promise me that the “Lord will renew the joy of my youth”. If my life is touched by that joy, won’t I “abound in good works”?

   So maybe the real question is our own “so what?” Our answer to the question “what difference does religion mean in my life?” defines us.

   Can we truly count our blessings and begin to see the grace of God in our lives? If the answer is yes, then not only will we offer thanksgiving, but we will abound in good works.

   Just as gifts of bread and wine change to become Christ’s Body given and his Blood poured out, so are we consecrated in communion with him to become one Spirit in Christ. God will be at work outside these church doors to make his love and compassion manifest. To be human, in Jesus, calls forth the best in us, formed and nurtured in the light of grace.
And that, dear ones, is why we are here today. We gather in this place where the scriptures are read, the word proclaimed, and the sacraments given to say with one voice that God is among us. In Christ, God is beneath us and over us, behind us and before us, with us and within us. As we come to this altar, may we always choose to live in his presence. That single decision changes everything.