

**Grandpa's Stories
at St. Andrew**

**GOD
IN OUR
LIVES**

Grandpa's Love

To our precious Phoebe, Amedeo and Damiano
with gratitude, love and admiration.

August 2026

Each one of you has received a special grace, so like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourselves at the service of others.

1 Peter 4:10

There is a longing in our hearts, o Lord for you to reveal yourself to us.

There is a longing in our hearts for love we only find in you, our God.

For justice, for freedom, for mercy, hear our prayer.

In sorrow, in grief, be near, hear our prayer, o God.

There is a longing in our hearts, o Lord for you to reveal yourself to us.

There is a longing in our hearts for love we only find in you, our God.

For wisdom, for courage, for comfort, hear our prayer.

In weakness, in fear, be near, hear our prayer, o God.

There is a longing in our hearts, o Lord for you to reveal yourself to us.

There is a longing in our hearts for love we only find in you, our God.

For healing, for wholeness, for new life, hear our prayer.

In sickness, in death, be near, hear our prayer, o God.

Lord, save us, take pity, light in our darkness.

We call you, we wait.

be near, hear our prayer, o God.

There is a longing in our hearts, o Lord for you to reveal yourself to us.

There is a longing in our hearts for love we only find in you, our God.

By Anne Quigley - There is a Longing in Our Hearts, ©1992

But I shall show you a still more excellent way.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things.

At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13

Tell me why? Tell me why? Tell me why?
Umm, why can't we live together?
Tell me why? Tell me why?
Umm, why can't we live together?
Everybody wants to live together
Why can't we live together?

No more wars, no more wars, no more war
Umm, just a little peace in this world
No more wars, no more war
All we want is some peace in this world

Everybody wants to live together
Why can't we live together?

Can't live, can't live
Can't live together
Can't live together

No matter, no matter what color
Umm, you are still my brother
I said, "No matter, no matter what color
Umm, you are still my brother"

Everybody wants to live together
Why can't we live together?

By Timmy Thomas – Why Can't We Live Together

There is freedom within, there is freedom without
Try to catch a deluge in a paper cup
There's a battle ahead, many battles are lost
But you'll never see the end of the road
While you're traveling with me

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come to build a wall between us
We know they won't win

Now I'm towing my car, there's a hole in the roof
My possessions are causing me suspicion, but there's no
proof
In the paper today, tales of war and of waste
But you turn right over to the TV page

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come to build a wall between us
We know they won't win

Now I'm walking again to the beat of a drum
And I'm counting the steps to the door of your heart
Only shadows ahead, barely clearing the roof
Get to know the feeling of liberation and release

Hey now, hey now, don't dream it's over
Hey now, hey now, when the world comes in
They come, they come to build a wall between us
You know they won't win

Don't let them win
Hey now, hey now
Hey now, hey now

By Nei Finn, Crowded House – Don't Dream It's Over

Contents

Introduction	11
Cycle A 3rd Sunday of Advent	12
Cycle C 4th Sunday of Advent	15
Cycle C The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)	18
Cycle C Feast of the Holy Family.....	22
Cycle C Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God	27
Cycle A The Baptism of The Lord	31
Cycle C 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	34
Cycle A 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	39
Cycle A 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	44
Cycle C 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	47
Cycle A 1st Sunday of Lent.....	51
Cycle C 2nd Sunday of Lent.....	56
Cycle C 3rd Sunday of Lent	60
Cycle C 4th Sunday of Lent.....	64
Cycle A 5th Sunday of Lent – 3rd Scrutiny.....	69
Cycle A 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	75
Cycle B Palm Sunday	78
Cycle C Easter Sunday.....	83
Cycle C 2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday	87
Cycle A 3rd Sunday of Easter	92
Cycle C 3rd Sunday of Easter	98
Cycle A 4th Sunday in Easter.....	102
Cycle B 4th Sunday of Easter	107
Cycle C 5th Sunday of Easter.....	110
Cycle A The Ascension of the Lord.....	114

Cycle B Pentecost Sunday.....	117
Cycle B The Body and Blood of Christ.....	122
Cycle A 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	127
Cycle A 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	131
Cycle B 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	135
Cycle C 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	140
Cycle A 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	145
Cycle C 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	148
Cycle C 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	152
Cycle B 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	156
Cycle B 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	159
Cycle C 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	163
Cycle A 28 th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	168
Cycle B 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	171
Cycle C 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	174
Cycle B 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	178
Cycle B 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	182
Cycle A 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	186
Cycle B 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	190
Cycle C 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time.....	194
Cycle A Christ the King.....	199
Cycle B Christ the King.....	204
Grandpa’s Playlist.....	208
EPILOGUE.....	212

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Introduction

Dear Phoebe, Amedeo and Damiano, Lot's has happened to us since the first edition of my book I wrote to you in 2018. Now that I'm 80 years old, it's time for an update.

We met the challenges of the Covid epidemic that overshadowed our lives with some setbacks...and opportunities. I had planned to retire as a Deacon on my 75th birthday in 2021. I figured if Bishops must request retirement at 75, so should I. But with the Covid lockdown, I decided to retire in June 2020 because I wasn't going back to serve until I was vaccinated. When the country began to open up again in 2021, it was time for a change, so we joined St. Andrew parish in Roswell, GA. The greeting we received was better than we hoped! Father Dan, the Pastor, invited me to join the clergy team as a retired [now called Senior] Deacon, and I discovered how much I had missed preaching. And that I actually had been on sabbatical to listen and learn. Our new Pastor, Father Juan, welcomed me to preach frequently as well. I am so grateful to them both!

I preached all these homilies at St. Andrew...some were videoed...the link shown to deaconrogerfraser.com is maintained by your Dad/Uncle Chris. I really wanted you to see and hear these videos so hopefully you could hear the other homilies in my voice as well. The crux of them all is that God is in our lives, loving everyone unconditionally ...we are all His creation...and we are all sinners and saints at the same time.

See you soon my not-so-little ones.

Be Safe. Be Healthy. Be Kind. Be Blessed. Be Funny...Be in the Moment. Love, Grandpa Fraser

Cycle A 3rd Sunday of Advent

Reading I IS 35:1-6a, 10

The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song. The glory of Lebanon will be given to them, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak, say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing. Those whom the LORD has ransomed will return and enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy; they will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee.

Reading II JAS 5:7-10

Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that you may not be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates. Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Gospel MT 11:2-11

When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus said to them in reply, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you. Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

“Is Jesus the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

About 18 years ago my wife Pat and I were in San Francisco with our two sons and their wives. Early on Christmas morning we were walking to Mission Dolores Basilica, when I noticed lying on the sidewalk next to a homeless person bundled up in their cardboard box and blankets, was a new pair of Thorlo socks. My son Christopher explained that some people in the neighborhood give the street people these gifts every Christmas. That small gesture of giving a pair of socks in my mind is a perfect example of the light of Christ shining in this world. A few years later we were back in San Francisco to be with our family...but, that year was extra special...I had the privilege of baptizing my first grandchild, Damiano (can you tell his mama is Italian?) Then 3 years later I baptized my second grandson, Amedeo. Claiming Damiano and Amedeo for Jesus and joyfully welcoming them into the body of Christ were amazing blessings, especially because we used the 250-year-old font in the Mission Delores old Mission chapel. Imagine the thousands who were baptized in that place! I dearly love the Sacrament of Baptism because it truly shines the light of Christ into the world ever more brightly. Well, we were convinced that 2 grandchildren were it...no more to come. But then, 6 years ago a little girl named Phoebe was born into our lives. Now we are experiencing the light of Christ again! And, that brightness of God's glory is what we anticipate and celebrate today on Advent's Third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday.

The scriptures today tell us that God loves us so much that He sent many prophets over the centuries to clearly tell us that the glory of God is coming into our lives. Like Isaiah, of the 1st reading, who lived over 700 years before Jesus and whose name means “Yahweh is salvation.” Isaiah told us the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be cleared when we see the glory of God. But in the Gospel, the final and greatest prophet John the Baptist's image of the Messiah of being a stern judge executing fiery judgement on sinners was challenged. When John hears of Jesus' attitude towards sinners, especially his eating with sinners, he begins to wonder if Jesus is really the One. He wonders if he should look elsewhere. This was a huge faith crisis for John. So, he asked his disciples to respond to a question of faith: *“Is Jesus the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”*

In response to John's question, Jesus does not give a straight answer but points to what is happening through His life: *“the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.”* Note that He does not directly say that *He* heals them. Rather Jesus affirms that his miracles are works of God happening through Him. The miracles of

Jesus are signs...bright signs for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear...we must ask, are we the blind and the deaf? We have to work this out for ourselves...like St. John the Baptist and his disciples, each of us has to make a decision of faith: *"Is Jesus the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"*

On this Gaudete Sunday let us rejoice that we are Christians, because it is through this community that God gives us that gift of faith and that we share in the gift of Christ in our lives. We know that Jesus is present here to transform our broken and sin-filled lives... Jesus is here today with us on this altar in His body and blood...He is here today in the Word of God we heard...and never forget, He is here in each of us...our community is living in His kingdom as the Body of Christ serving God and our fellow man.

As I look out over this sanctuary, I know that each of us will be sharing the light of Christ once or twice, or even ten times a day. Because of our community, I know that hundreds of people, maybe thousands even, will receive the light of Christ every day. You see, I understand because I saw a pair of socks next to a homeless person. And I have no doubt that we experienced the light of Christ when Damiano and Amedeo and Phoebe were born. And I understand that through us, even though our gestures are small, the glory of God does come to replace the darkness of the world.

And, that my friends is something to celebrate this Sunday!!

AMEN! Alleluia!

Cycle C 4th Sunday of Advent

Reading I, MT 5:1-4a

Thus says the LORD: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel. He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

Reading II, HEB 10:5-10

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; in holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight. Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God.’”

First he says, “Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in.” These are offered according to the law. Then he says: Behold, I come to do your will.” He takes away the first to establish the second. By this “will,” we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Gospel, LK 1:39-45

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

The readings on this 4th Sunday of Advent, especially the Gospel visitation story of Elizabeth and Mary, switch our focus to the birth of Jesus and teach us something about Hope and God's way of working. God prefers to make Himself present and work through ordinary people who lack importance or status according to worldly standards. God loves us so much that He sent His son to be our Savior and to show us how important it is to be born into humble surroundings. If we want to be sensitive to God's presence and open to His purposes, we have to rid ourselves of any desire to be superior or to look down on other people. Blessed are the people who serve day-to-day with simplicity and a lack of worldly sophistication. If we don't learn and live that kind of simplicity, we'll miss the vital message that God is always trying to communicate to us...*"I love all of My Creation!"*

A few years ago, friends of mine, Mark and Susan, were out walking at 6:00AM. They had a rough week...their daughter had just filed for divorce and the whole family was in turmoil. It was garbage day, so they didn't think much about seeing the garbage truck coming down the street...but when the driver stopped his truck as he got near them, hopped out and approached them, they wondered what was wrong. Imagine their surprise when the garbage man said to them, "would you pray with me?" It was stunning, Mark said...it lifted them up...it made their day, and if that wasn't a message from God, then he had no idea what had just happened. That experience is what I am talking about...it was an every-day God-filled opportunity that makes our ordinary lives extraordinary!

In the first reading, we see how God chose Bethlehem, *"too small to be among the clans of Judah"* as the prophet Micah puts it. So it was not unusual for God to turn to such a community as the place from which the Savior would emerge. It was God's constant practice to choose the weak, as St Paul says, making them strong for carrying out His purpose.

In the Gospel we hear about Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, who had been unable to have children and had become resigned to the fact that she would never have any. Among the Jews at that time this was a matter of great regret and even some shame. Whatever the real cause was it was always considered to be the woman's fault. So in her own community Elizabeth's status was inferior and unworthy. And, it would have been a source of pain and embarrassment for her and her husband Zacharia as well. But God thinks differently and many times when He has something to communicate, He picks people who are lacking in prominence. So He chose Elizabeth as the person He wanted for a special task: to give life to

John the Baptist, the herald who would announce the coming of the Christ.

When we turn to Mary we find someone who didn't have any reluctance in responding to God's call. But she was a young peasant girl from a drab town, Nazareth, what could she do? Like the other people God preferred to choose, she didn't have any great status. But, she was blessed with God's grace and filled with uncomplicated faith and devotion...and the Hope that one day the Christ would appear to reconcile his people with God.

So maybe the readings this Sunday, and especially the gospel figures of Elizabeth and Mary, will prepare us for this Christmas and the New Year 2026 by teaching us something about Hope and God's way of working. Maybe we will now be ready to recognize those God-filled opportunities where God prefers to make Himself present and work through us ordinary people who lack importance or status according to worldly standards.

But above all we shouldn't overthink our every-day God-filled opportunities...listen for the vital message that God is always trying to communicate to us: *"I love all of My Creation!"* Watch for the God-filled opportunities to be "The Body of Christ" sharing God's Love! We're in this TOGETHER!

And the Church says, AMEN!

Cycle C The Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

Mass during the Day

Reading I Is 52:7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, "Your God is King!" Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry, together they shout for joy, for they see directly, before their eyes, the LORD restoring Zion. Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the LORD comforts his people, he redeems Jerusalem. The LORD has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God.

Reading II Heb 1:1-6

Brothers and sisters: In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say: You are my son; this day I have begotten you? Or again: I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me? And again, when he leads the firstborn into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God worship him.

Gospel Jn 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him.

But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwell in among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

The church teaches us that the most important feast of the year is Easter, not Christmas. And yet, we don't decorate trees indoors and out at Easter, we don't sing carols at Pentecost or set up Shrines for the feast of Christ the King, or have midnight mass on the Transfiguration. But at Christmas we do it all. So why do you think we expend such energy on the Christmas feast and celebrate it so lavishly?

While there are many reasons, maybe the central one is that Christmas celebrates the most comforting and yet shocking aspect of our Christian revelations: God became human.

We expect God to be divine and be almighty and all powerful ...and so we have plenty of divinity-centered feasts celebrating Jesus at Easter and the Ascension, at Christ the King and the Transfiguration. But in the whole of our Christian year, we have only two great feasts which seem more focused on the humanity of Jesus: Christmas: when God's humanity is revealed in a manger, and Good Friday, when God's humanity is revealed on a cross. Even though, it's pretty obvious that we prefer the manger over the cross.

Christmas is a feast where images of mother and child, of Angels and shepherds and Wise Men, help us sense the love that God must have for us. We taste something of the passion that God must feel for us. We glimpse something of the communion that God longs to have with us. And the secret here, the Good News here, is that if God has so much love for us, and so much passion for us, maybe we can learn such love, and even passion for God....and for each other...even for those we don't like, we know God so passionately loves them. This is both the great treasure of our Christmas feast and its utmost challenge. For while God has been united with humanity, God is still waiting for our journey to the divine in a world where there is too much violence, where too many people lack basic human needs, and where the dignity of all mankind is plundered. Too often Christmas seems like just a commercialized myth.

So, I would like to offer a special conversation...a prayer, if you will...that I pulled from the lyrics of a favorite Christmas song. Maybe this will help us embrace what the scriptures told us about Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity on this joyous Christmas morning:

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered will soon deliver you!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy will calm the storm with his hand?

Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God.

Mary, did you know the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the dead will live again,

The lame will leap, the dumb will speak the praises of the Lamb.

Mary, did you know that your baby boy, Is our Lord...the Lord of all Creation?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?

Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb?

That sleeping child you're holding is the Great I Am!

Mary, did you know?

Lord Jesus, may our lips praise you, may our lives proclaim your goodness, may our works give you honor, may our voices celebrate you for ever and ever...and may Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless us all.

And the Church says, AMEN!

Cycle C Feast of the Holy Family

Reading 1 SIR 3:2-6, 12-14

God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and, when he prays, is heard. Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother. My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life; kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt of your sins...a house raised in justice to you.

Reading COL 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put-on loves, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Gospel LK 2:41-52

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great

anxiety.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

During these days, these holy days of Christmas time, a question comes to mind, a question to which we all know the answer, but asking it causes us to focus our thoughts among all of the distractions of this holiday season: Does God long to belong?

The reality behind all of the images of these Christmas days is that of God coming to us in order to belong. God comes to us in love, an inviting love that calls us to belong to Him. Philosophers and theologians speak in abstract language using rather dry and remote mental concepts. The images of these Christmas days are very warm, very human, images that reach our hearts, touching them with the language of love.

We began with John the Baptist calling us to prepare, to set aside all of our busy-ness and concerns of this world and prepare for what God is going to do for us. You see, it's not about what we are doing for God, important as that is. The real thing that's happening is that God is coming to us, offering Himself to us in His only begotten Son. It's all about God seeking us out; God coming to us in love.

Then there is Mary six months pregnant, traveling some distance to be with her cousin Elizabeth. Artists have painted masterpieces about the Visitation. In that event there was a mysterious meeting of the Christ child and John the Baptist, both of them still in the wombs of their mothers. God the Son comes to John the Baptist even before they are born! John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb. What an extraordinary reaching out that was.

Then God, having taken on human flesh in Mary's womb, is born among us. Amazing events surround that event. Angels from on high descend to our earth. Lowly shepherds living near Bethlehem, not the powerful elite living in Jerusalem, are the first to encounter the Christ child. Heaven comes to earth in a most unexpected way and place. God is reaching out to humans in an extraordinary way, far beyond any of our human expectations.

Love does that. Love is driven to seek union. God's love, God's longing for belonging, is infinitely beyond anything we might imagine. If the events surrounding the birth of Christ seem to be unreal, it is because they are. They are totally beyond anything the human mind understands to be real.

The central image now comes into focus. It is the image of a baby being held in his mother's arms while Joseph, their protector, stands near. What deeper belonging could there be?

Is there anything that speaks to us of belonging that is greater than this picture, a picture of a reality far above and beyond anything that we can rationalize with our minds? What could possibly be more a more powerful statement of God's longing to belong than this? The bond of intimacy between a mother and her child is something that is clearly understood in any culture at any time anywhere in the world. No belonging is deeper or stronger than this.

All that we have just looked at is only the beginning. God's self-expression of Himself to us, having come to us in the birth of His Son, goes on to cause His Son to enter into and fully engage our world and that dark forces that roam throughout our world. And how does Jesus do that? He calls twelve simple men to draw near to Him and living in a belonging, a bonded community, of disciples. Our Messiah accomplished His mission through belonging.

Isn't that what our Church is all about – calling us to belong, calling us to bring others into our family of faith? Isn't that what our parish is all about – bringing us together around God's family table, the altar on which Jesus Christ offers Himself to us here in our family room, our parish church? He comes to us to belong to us in Holy Communion, a union with God like no other.

It's important for us, I think, to pay attention to these images and the big picture of these Christmas Holy Days. It's no secret that what it means to be a family is undergoing a redefinition right now in our culture. No longer is the term "family" applied strictly to a household with mom, dad and the children all living together in the same home at the same time. As a matter of fact, what is known as the nuclear family, or traditional family, is now in the minority. We have now various arrangements found in single parent families, in families in which the parents are of the same gender, and in families in which one parent is simply living with a boyfriend or a girlfriend.

So how can we model ourselves after the Holy Family? After all, we are not the extraordinary people found in today's readings, living among the extraordinary events in which they lived. How does their model apply to us? The answer, I think, is to recognize that they lived fully dedicated to their faith. They lived out their religious practices and then went far beyond. They lived in wonder, in the wondrous recognition of all of the

comings of God to them and responded by always seeking out God, by always living in the wonder of His presence.

Much needs to be done to build up and buttress our present-day families. A holistic and holy family is integrated, not fractured; other-centered, not self-centered; lives in forgiveness, affirms the uniqueness of each of its members; builds up instead of tears down; is mindful of God and not neglectful of His Presence and love.

Cycle C Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God

January 1, 2025

Gospel starts at 14:02

Homily starts at 15:30

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I Numbers 6:22-27

The LORD said to Moses: "Speak to Aaron and his sons and tell them: This is how you shall bless the Israelites. Say to them: The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace! So shall they invoke my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Reading II Galatians 4:4-7

Brothers and sisters: When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God.

Gospel Luke 2:16-21

The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them. When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Happy New Year! For the vast majority of our fellow citizens today obviously is New Years Day, the beginning of the secular year. No doubt a day to celebrate!

But for us Catholics, January 1 is a much more significant celebration...and one that unfortunately is easily overlooked. Eight days after celebrating God becoming human, the birth of Jesus, we celebrate the mystery linking our Creator to His created, humanity sharing in the divine!

Today is the feast of the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. Mary's divine motherhood feast is the most important and oldest of the major feasts of Mary dating from the 6th century... but it was placed on January 1 very recently in 1970...it was another gift of Vatican II.

The rich Tradition of the Church has recognized January 1, the octave day, the 8th day after Christmas, as a special holiday since the early church. For 1500 years it had been celebrated as the feast of the Circumcision, when Jesus on the 8th day after He was born underwent the ritual that rendered him a Jew. Today's Gospel echoes that feast and reminds us that the naming of Jesus, meaning Savior, is also celebrated.

When we consider the title of Mary as "Mother of God," this feast and the underlying teaching stress that Mary was not just the mother of Jesus in His human nature. But, Mary was also Mother of the Christ, in His divine nature as the Son of God.

Theotokos the Greeks called her – the God bearer. This belief is not like Greek mythology, however, where Hercules whose mother was a mortal and whose father was a God, and he was in turn called a demi-god. No, we believe Jesus was born fully human and fully divine. He had a human mother, the Mother of the person of Jesus fully in his humanity and divinity.

I know how difficult that sounds. How could a human parent the divine? But it is precisely in that paradox, in that mystery of joining the human and divine, in the inexplicable linking our Creator with the created, that hope is what we celebrate anew on this 1st day of the new year!

Mary knew from the start that life would not be easy. So, on January 1, we see Mary just days after a grueling journey to Bethlehem and an amazing birth in a barn. She carried out the promise she had made to Gabriel. *"Let it be done unto me according to your will,"* Mary said. The child was born healthy and cuddly, and the angels, unable to contain

their joy, once more danced into her life! It would seem that Mary should be able to seek some quiet and rest after all that had happened. But, no...company came! Unkept shepherds, straight from the fields, “went in haste” to the shelter, announcing that they had been told who this baby was. The angels had trumpeted it to them! The “Wise Men” also found the holy shelter and barged right in, bearing royal gifts. Does this all impinge on Mary’s peace? Incredibly, it seems not. She was good to her word. The Gospel says that she quietly *“kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”* No doubt, part of it was her personality, but even more, it was the presence of God deep within her, so deep that her human life had united with His divinity.

There’s that “human and divine” again. We call it a mystery, but for us Catholics it is all around us. In the scripture today, *“God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.”* At our Baptism, our soul is flooded with the Holy Spirit. At Confirmation we receive the full gifts of the Spirit. At every Mass at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist when the altar is being prepared, the water and wine are mixed and a silent prayer is said: *“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.”* The mingling of the wine points to the Incarnation: the mystery of God becoming man. It also points to our call to share in Christ’s divine life, to become ‘partakers of the divine nature.’ Remember, we don’t just come to Mass just to receive some-thing, Communion. No, we come to receive and then become some-one...the Body of Christ! Humanity sharing in the divine!

Today we are reminded that Mary is not only the queen of heaven, but that God loves us so much that even as sinners all of us are an extraordinary part of His plan. Like Mary, who along with Joseph, played the critical role of teaching God how to be a human being. We are called to have her humility and tenacity. Mary, the God bearer, had a graced-filled fidelity to her son’s ministry, and so should we! Maybe Mary has something to teach us as the old year transitions to the new...our simple resolutions to lose a few pounds and to eat healthy are aiming much too low! We need to follow Jesus Christ and resolve to reach out to find new friends and live a more authentic life as the Body of Christ serving others with God’s love!

Maybe humanity sharing in the divine is not such a mystery after all! The real mystery, I think, is why don’t more people celebrate this today!

And the Church says with renewed devotion: *“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”*

Cycle A The Baptism of The Lord

FIRST READING: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Thus says the LORD: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

SECOND READING: Acts 10:34-38

Peter proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

GOSPEL: Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

I recently heard about the celebrated Protestant preacher and professor, Fred Craddock, who was once invited to preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church...the church of Martin Luther King Senior and Junior here in Atlanta. I wish I had learned his methods of crafting homilies 25 years ago when I was in formation.

Mr. Craddock had moved to the pulpit to read the Gospel when the pastor began to sing. "Then the associates started singing, and the musicians went to their instruments, the piano and the organ and the drums and the electric guitar, and the people started singing. Craddock was standing up there, waiting. Then, he suddenly realized, 'I'm the one up front, I'm the leader of this,' so he started clapping his hands and singing. Then everybody stood up and started clapping their hands and swinging and singing, and it was just marvelous. Then at a certain point the pastor put his hand out...it got quiet, everyone sat down and Craddock started preaching. He acted like 'he could've preached all day.' Afterwards he said to the pastor, 'Well, that kind of shocked me a little bit. You didn't tell me you were going to do that.' He said, 'Well, I didn't plan it.' 'Then why did you do it?' And the pastor said, 'Well, when you stood up there, one of my associates leaned over to me and said, *That boy's going to need some help.*'"

Reflecting on today's Gospel about the Baptism of the Lord, Mr. Craddock repeated, "*That boy's going to need some help.*" He continued, "I can just see God The Father and The Holy Spirit peering down from heaven on John the Baptist down by the Jordan. Here comes Jesus, determined to get started on his mission and full of vim, vigor and bright ideas. And The Spirit turns to The Father and says, "*That boy's going to need some help.*" And The Father thinks about it a few moments, looks out over the horizon and into the future and sees the trials and tribulations, the sadness and sorrow, the great praise mixed with hopeless failure and frequent rejection. And The Father nods sadly and says to The Spirit, "*I believe you're right. That boy is going to some help.*" And then a slow smile spread across the Father's face and He said, "*And guess what Spirit; you're it!*"

I like that story for a variety of reasons. It reminds us that we can always rely on our musicians for a little help. It also reminds us that baptism – both Jesus' and our own – is about action, not holiness; about doing something, not just being somebody; and that we can always use a little help when living the Gospel...especially when doing justice work.

A while ago I visited that same Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta where Mr. Craddock preached at and I stood outside at the tomb of Martin Luther and Coretta King. The tomb is on an island in the middle of a gentle waterfall. And that waterfall is engraved with the inspired

text that Dr. King spoke on August 28, 1963 in his “I have a Dream” speech at the now-famous March on Washington. He paraphrased Amos 5:24 when he said, We will not be satisfied *“until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

“Jesus’s baptism launched him into the deep waters of humanity, into a mission to erase our inhumane lack of attentiveness to each other, to raise up the dignity of all, to let justice and righteousness role like a mighty stream. But as in His day, today there are many currents of prejudice, rising tides of hatred, and torrents of hostility threatening to submerge the dignity of people around the world and in our backyard.”

And so we take up our baptismal challenge assured that we “who need a little help,” might be strengthened by God’s mighty Holy Spirit who flooded our souls at our baptism... To do the justice work Isaiah proclaims in the first reading...to be *“a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.”* And, for us to continue the Jesus work of *“doing good and healing all those oppressed”* that Peter urges in the second reading.

[musicians begin softly playing “We Shall Overcome”]

You may know that I am Irish by marriage...my wife Pat says she is 87.5% Irish. There is an ancient Irish legend that when the Old Irish immersed a baby at baptism, they left the right arm out of the font so that it would remain pagan for combat.

On this feast day ending the Christmas season, I trust we will re-immense our right hand in Holy Water on the way out of church, so that we will be blessed to be prepared for holy combat: to find the lost, heal the broken, feed the hungry, release the prisoners, support all nations, bring peace among all... and, that *“we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

And the Church says AMEN!

Cycle C 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Is 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch. Nations shall behold your vindication, and all the kings your glory; you shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the LORD. You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem held by your God. No more shall people call you "Forsaken," or your land "Desolate," but you shall be called "My Delight," and your land "Espoused." For the LORD delights in you and makes your land his spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

Reading II, 1 Cor 12:4-11

Brothers and sisters: There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another, the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another, mighty deeds; to another, prophecy; to another, discernment of spirits; to another, varieties of tongues; to another, interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

Gospel, Jn 2:1-11

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from although the servers who had

drawn the water knew, the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him. "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.

His Mother said to the servers, "do whatever He tells you."

This Sunday, we hear one of the most familiar stories in the New Testament...on the surface, most often it is thought of as just a wedding story. But, if we dig deeper, we start to realize more than just a wedding is going on. We witness an intimate exchange between mother and son. Mary knew her son's potential as only a mother can know. Could this have been her last push for Him to get on with His life? Afterall, He had moved out of her house and already had disciples. Then Mary makes a statement not only for the servers at the wedding, but for His disciples to hear, and in fact for all mankind...for the rest of eternity, *"do whatever He tells you."*

To put this into context, this Sunday resumes Ordinary Time... Christmas season officially ended last week. And yet, since Advent, every Sunday has focused on some revelation, some manifestation of God: with John the Baptist, the Visitation, then the Nativity, Shepherds, the Holy Family, Jesus the tween in the temple, the Magi, and last Sunday the Baptism of Jesus. Even though the manifestation cycle is technically over, the epiphanies, the "signs" as John calls them, continue into Ordinary Time. Now we hear about Jesus' response to his mother's statement, *"they have no wine."* He says His hour has not yet come, but then He does the impossible. So how did this event of turning water into wine reveal His glory? We start to comprehend that the Gospel is more than one story. Something new is happening with Jesus in the world..."do whatever He tells you," says it all!

What touches me about today's Gospel is that this sign of Jesus turning water into wine is more than just one miracle of hospitality or graciousness to save a wedding celebration...it is a fountain of signs, of epiphanies of hope and commitment binding our community of believers...first revealed to those surrounding Jesus, and eventually to all mankind, including to us today....even when our cup is empty and our cupboard has run dry.

I think to understand this early story of Jesus, this first miracle at Cana, we need to understand how profoundly it foreshadows the future wondrous signs, the future miracles fostered by water and wine, especially when His "hour" did come at the Last Supper and at Golgatha. We know how that story ends. At Easter we hear the metaphors of hearts fermenting and changing, with the 4th Cup of the Last Supper Passover meal, and of the pouring out of God's own wine in the blood of His Son, who when hanging on the cross, eternal wine and water flowed from His

side...and of His Resurrection when His Church was born to help change the hearts of mankind! Water into wine.

I love the revelation of the 4th Cup of the Last Supper Passover meal that Dr. Scott Hahn writes about. The traditional Jewish Passover Seder service celebrates a meal with four cups of wine. The Passover Seder peaks and then ends with the drinking of the 4th cup of wine.

At the Last Supper, however, Jesus left the Passover liturgy unfinished in the upper room by not drinking the 4th cup. He stated His intention not to drink wine again until He came into the glory of His Kingdom. He refused some “wine drugged with myrrh” right before being nailed to the cross (Mark 15:23). Then, at the very end, Jesus was again offered wine (John 19:29; Matt 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36). But only John tells us how He responded: *“When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit”* (John 19:30).

You see, it was the New Covenant that was finished...before His life ended! More precisely, it was Jesus’ transformation of the Passover sacrifice of the Old Covenant into the Eucharistic sacrifice of the New Covenant...again, metaphorically turning water into wine. His Eucharistic sacrifice as the Passover lamb of the New Covenant, done once, and for all, was complete. His time had come and God’s glory was revealed for all to see!

Today some of us might feel as though we are living in the first blush of the wedding feast...with stores of wine and grace that will last forever... but surely, life doesn’t work that way! Or some of us may feel that our cup is already empty. Our “vat” of blessed wine or grace or love has already run dry. In the shadow of this week’s Martin Luther King holiday, I wonder what this civil rights martyr would say if he were alive today, in this country, in today’s world... would he ask, “Where’s the good wine?” Sometimes I think that even his storehouse of exhilarating rhetoric and the spilling of his blood has moved us no further away from racism than where we were on that Thursday evening in April of 1968.

However melancholy that leaves us on today’s celebration of another sign, another epiphany, another manifestation of God, when we dig deeper, today’s readings are seen as a joyous invitation of hope and commitment binding us together. The 4th cup and the cross that Jesus would not bypass, but instead drank deeply and embraced, are handed on to us – His Delights, His Espoused. Are we willing to *“do whatever He tells us?”* To drink of this cup and take up our cross? These are Eucharistic metaphors for denying ourselves and pouring ourselves out

in service to others...are we willing to be committed to serve God by serving those whose personal, spiritual, emotional, or physical “vats” have gone dry and whose cupboards are bare?

So...now I trust, that we can think of today’s Gospel as much more than just a simple wedding miracle story. His story continues. The epiphany of water and wine are central to our Eucharist celebration. At every Mass at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist when the altar is being prepared, water and wine are mixed in the Cup and a silent prayer is said: “By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” The mingling of the water and wine points to the Incarnation: the mystery of God becoming man. It also points to our call to share in Christ’s divine life. Remember, we don’t come to Mass just to receive some-thing. No, we come to receive some-one, the Risen Jesus Christ...so together we can then become the Body of Christ to share His love! Water into wine!

[soft piano plays “We Shall Overcome”]

We Christians are committed to be relentless disciples of Jesus Christ “*doing whatever He tells us.*” For it is only in drinking deeply of His cup, and in the suffering and commitment of the cross...even in light of so much racial hatred and violence in our cities, at our borders, and around the globe...that we too are lifted by the soaring spirit of dignity and justice in the words of the historic Civil Rights song so closely identified with Martin Luther King’s non-violent legacy...that We’ll Walk Hand-in-Hand, that We Shall Live in Peace, that We Shall All Be Free, that We Are Not Afraid...Oh, Deep in My Heart, I Do Believe, We Shall Overcome Some Day!

And the Church says AMEN!

Cycle A 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 IS 8:23-9:3

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the end he has glorified the seaward road, the land west of the Jordan, the District of the Gentiles. Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness: for there is no gloom where but now there was distress. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Reading 2 1 COR 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Gospel MT 4:12-23

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled: Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen. From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they

were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him. He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people.

Thinking about today's readings made me wonder if some of the geography in today's readings hold the promise of unexpected revelation. Scriptures are frequently punctuated with geographic references. Some of them, like Bethlehem or Jerusalem, are familiar to us. Others are a little more obscure like the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali mentioned in the first reading and Gospel. This area, in the north of Palestine, better known as Galilee, is the place where Jesus grew up and began his ministry. While as the crow flies it was only about 70 miles north of Jerusalem, it was socially and culturally quite different, probably because it had been invaded so often with foreign armies frequently marching across this land.

But the northerners were different in another way, holding to a kind of tribal thinking dating back to the time of the 12 tribes. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the 12 sons of Jacob and the place of their legacy believed that they were directly under God's rule. Even at the time of Jesus this area had a reputation of being politically independent minded, even rebellious.

Galilee was quite different from the southern province of Judea with its holy city of Jerusalem – different racially, economically, culturally, linguistically. One New Testament scholar offers this caricature of Jesus the northerner when visiting his southern cousins: even an impeccably Jewish Galilean, like Jesus, in first-century Jerusalem was not among his own people; he was as much a foreigner as a Texan in New York. His accent would immediately mark him out as “not one of us,” and all the communal prejudice of the supposedly superior culture of the capital city would stand against his claim to be heard even as a prophet, let alone as the “Christ,” a title which, as everyone knew, belonged to Judea.

But as in many good stories, geography is an important actor. In fact, geography is an important Gospel character, most dramatically in the Gospel of Luke which pivots when Jesus turns toward Jerusalem (9:51) but also, here in Matthew. It both fascinates and enlightens to consider Jesus not only as a bumpkin from a backwater town (“could any good come from Nazareth?” as said in the book of John 1:46), but that Jesus was also from a part of the country that has a reputation for being rebellious, independent and maybe even what one commentator labels “from a hot bed of banditry.” Jesus the rebel, Jesus the free thinker, Jesus the bandit...now there's a string of titles we probably haven't heard before.

There is strong evidence that we have deep affection for bandits, rebels and apple-cart-up-setters. Think about the way we cheer on Butch Cassidy and his Sundance buddy; or Captain Jack Sparrow, our favorite Disney Pirate; or Robin Hood in his many reincarnations. Jesus as charming bandit maybe pushing the limits here, but in today's Gospel he easily stole two professional fishermen away from their nets and wives and absconded with two others from their father's business with apparently little less than a wink and a smile. While no prince, he must have been charming. But the unique revelation in Jesus' banditry is that it did not diminish others but only uplifted them ... ultimately, He was not lifted Himself except on a cross.

Jesus did symbolically steal from the rich, the elite, the clergy: he punctured their arrogance, their overblown piety and their self-inflated dignity, and raised up the marginalized, the leprous, the adulterous, and widowed and despoised.

But in doing so Bandit Jesus did not deprive the rich, the elite, the clergy from kingdom richness but instead invited them into new richness through a narrow gate inviting them to bow low as he did in his own incarnation.

In the end, this only begotten bandit stole dehumanization back from humanity, stole marginalization back from the marginalized, stole abuse back from the abused, stole disdain back from the distained, stole despair from the despairing, and stole the sting from death from all of humanity.

In words reverberating through today's Psalm – Jesus stole back darkness from every darkened heart and planted light in every point on the map willing to kindle it in every community wanting to embrace it, in everyone who accepted that modest candle, and in every soul hoping and dreaming of stepping into the sun.

But here's that problematic "so what" which rears its demanding head every time we plunge into the mystery of God.

There is so much darkness, greed, and prejudice among us, in our workplaces and schools and church, and most problematic, in our families. We are commissioned to kidnap it subvert it, oppose it, and reject it. In place of the stolen darkness, greed and intolerance we must replant Christ's light, Jesus' hope, radical hospitality, crucified love, and Gospel peace.

I have to be careful not to invoke a favorite text too often because it could be misconstrued as pushing a Franciscan agenda...But I gladly risk the subversion again this morning, in the spirit of a Jesuit pope smart enough to call himself Francis...let us pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Cycle A 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, ZEO 2:3; 3:12-13

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger. But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD: the remnant of Israel. They shall do no wrong and speak no lies; nor shall there be found in their mouths a deceitful tongue; they shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them.

Reading II, 1 COR 1:26-31

Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might boast before God. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord."

Gospel, MT 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, or they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

What kind of person does God want us to be? It is not an easy question to answer. But it is a question that we Catholics are expected to address throughout our lives. The Catechism explains that "Deep within our conscience we discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves, but which we must obey. Its voice, ever calling us to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in our heart at the right moment...For we have in our heart a law inscribed by God...Our conscience is our most secret core and our sanctuary. There we are alone with God whose voice echoes in our depths. Moral conscience, present in our hearts, commands us at the appropriate moment to do good and to avoid evil. It also judges particular choices, approving those that are good and denouncing those that are evil...When we listen to our conscience, we can hear God speaking. Return to your conscience, question it...Turn inward and in everything you do, see God as your witness." This never-ending search everyone, young and old, must undertake for themselves in order to find out what is worthy and what is not worthy...it is what we Catholics call the "formation of conscience." Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to teach us what kind of person He wants us to be...and He chooses us to continue His work every day of our lives.

To understand today's Gospel, we need to understand that in the time and world of Jesus, honor was a central value that drove all behavior. Honor was a public claim to worth and a public acknowledgment by others. The Beatitudes, which begin Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, are unique in several respects, but they are among the more than eighty "beatitudes" sprinkled throughout the Old and New Testaments. These are poetic sayings that present, encourage, and praise honorable behavior, particularly non-violence. So, rather than "happy," "fortunate," or even "blessed," the first word in each beatitude should more correctly be translated "truly honorable". In Jesus' view, true honor and esteem are determined and bestowed by God, very publicly, for all to see. But, the things that God considers truly honorable and worthy of praise are almost always the opposite of what we think. The Scriptures today tell us the kind of person God wants us to be...to humbly seek Him....to be poor in spirit, that is, to be totally dependent on God in every situation...in everyday life joys and disappointments....in every day pain, mourning and even persecution, we must keep God at the center of our lives. We must respond with an attitude of meekness; hungering for Jesus; being merciful to others; being clean of heart; being a peacemaker. It is not easy and does not always feel comfortable...but it is the kind of person He wants us to be.

As St. Augustine asked, “How is it, then, that I seek you, Lord? Since in seeking you, my God, I seek a happy life, let me seek you so that my soul may live, for my body draws life from my soul and my soul draws life from you.”

As we form our consciences we choose to be close to God and He promises His Kingdom. Today we can taste a glimmer of that promise if we respond to His call with an attitude of conversion. In the routine of coming to Church we hear and recognize His presence in the Scriptures...we can be converted by awakening to His presence...we open ourselves to His life, death and resurrection in the Holy Eucharist. As we come forward to receive Communion, we humbly seek Him and thereby experience the Kingdom of Heaven. If we are not in full communion with the Catholic Church or are in need of reconciliation with God’s grace, we shouldn’t take Communion. But, please do come up to receive the blessing of God.

Years ago I had the chance for a rather extraordinary way to form our consciences. I heard Sr. Helen Prejean, the renowned author of Dead Man Walking, help us probe the difficult questions of how Christians respond to violent crime and the death penalty. Of how we need to respond to support the victims, but also are called to share the love of Jesus with the guilty. It was a time for us to dig deep returning to our consciences with many questions . . . it was a time for us to turn inward with God as our witness to confront our prejudices and be challenged by what an apostle of Jesus is called to do. Jesus taught us that the Kingdom of God is for everyone.

And if we let Him, He will teach us what kind of person He wants us to be.

Cycle C 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 16, 2025

Gospel Starts at 15:38

Homily starts at 17:30

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 JER 17:5-8

Thus says the LORD: Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth. Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.

Reading 2 1 COR 15:12, 16-20

Brothers and sisters: If Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Gospel LK 6:17, 20-26

Jesus came down with the twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

The Scriptures today are filled with striking contrasts of blessings and curses. They are written in the Wisdom tradition to encourage us to choose the way that guarantees true joy and eternal life. They tell us that God loves us so much that He fills us with blessings when we trust in Jesus our Lord.

Someone once said: *"I've been poor, and I've been rich. Believe me, rich is better."* I doubt there are many of us here who would argue with that. Probably not many of the disciples in today's Gospel would have argued with this statement either. Jesus saw something unique in His "crowd of disciples." Most likely weren't hurting, they had no need of a cure, somehow, they could afford to travel, they had no hesitation to follow Jesus...and He knew they had something to learn. These disciples were not the poor people desperate for their next piece of bread...no, they were not like the larger crowd standing nearby who were in need of everything!

Compare the disciples to the author of the first reading. Jeremiah suffered terribly for trusting God alone. You may know his story: Jeremiah was called by God to challenge his own people, especially the leadership, to return to God's way of doing things. Jeremiah was denounced as a traitor and a public enemy! He was tortured, imprisoned, chased out of town and ended up in Egypt. Then a hit squad, sent by his own compatriots, found him there and killed him. No wonder Jeremiah is compared, during Holy Week, with Jesus himself. Both Jeremiah and Jesus could be taunted with: "He trusted in God. Now let God come and save him."

So, who is blessed and who is cursed? What is the way that guarantees true joy and eternal life?

Leading up to today's Gospel, Jesus spent the night on a mountain in prayer, He then chose His 12 apostles, came down with them from the hills, and standing on level ground among His disciples, He delivered the extraordinary Sermon on the Plain to literally level the field of have and have-nots. Jesus said to his disciples: *"Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, weeping, insulted."* They must have been stunned; this teaching was not expected. The Disciples weren't cursed as the poor, hungry, weeping or insulted were. And they must have been concerned when Jesus compared them unfavorably with the larger crowd of sick and poor nearby who were crying out for help.

I have to tell you, I am concerned that when we heard these Beatitudes, we were not as shocked, as stunned as the disciples were. Maybe it's because we have heard them so many times over the years...or maybe

we are just too comfortable in our lives to react...or maybe, like the disciples, we have something to learn. Jesus is telling us, challenging us, that the very values that we hold so dear, wealth, security, health, 'that rich is better'...everything that we strive so hard to achieve for ourselves and our family...are NOT of the utmost importance when it comes to the values of the Kingdom of God. How could this be?

The heart of the teaching is NOT that the poverty, starvation, sorrow or rejection determine our reward...we can't earn it. No, the Beatitudes make sense only to those who through our faith in Jesus have learned we can't do it alone...there is no such thing as a self-made man...we need to live a life of love prompted by the Holy Spirit. When we do something, like walking humbly, and taking care of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the alien...it is because we have recognized that we are dependent upon God...and only then can true joy and peace ensue. When we get prosperous, self-seeking, independent, and disregard the marginalized as parasites, then trouble ensues. This is why we who receive the woes are in danger. We are tempted to rely on our false sense of independence and security. It is difficult, if not impossible, to hold on to any sense of dependence upon God when you feel rich, consoled, filled and popular. Dependence upon God is ignored or seen as a sign of weakness...for some it seems like nonsense.

A friend of mine said, "well then, why didn't Jesus just say that?" I think it's because He had to shock us out of our complacency and call us to stand with the poor and hungry. Here's the secret: when we learn to "*do whatever He tells us,*" The poor will minister to US.

So, who is blessed and who is cursed?

There is a choice, according to Jeremiah: to seek happiness through our own human resources or seek it in God. To trust in ourselves ends in an arid, spiritual wilderness. To trust in God secures salvation. A person who trusts himself first and foremost wraps himself in a false security of health, wealth and worldly wisdom. A disciple of God, like Jeremiah, may appear to be a fool to some, but he is ultimately blessed by God. And Jesus trusted in the will of the Father that turned the curse of death on a cross into the blessing of resurrection and eternal life. Only God can do that!

So, now we have come to the crux of the matter. The point is that we are joined to Christ through our faith and Baptism. We don't merely believe that in Baptism we have died to sin and are raised to a new and transformed life...no, we experience death and resurrection over and over in our lives. But it's not life that teaches us...it is God. Christ takes

us where we don't expect...sometimes where we don't want to go. But He always stands with us... and He demands a great deal from us...but when we trust, miracles happen. He calls us to give up our cozy attachments...to do something for others...do something more than just charity...to stand where He stands...next to the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the persecuted and the marginalized! He calls us to live for others and not for ourselves. He calls, we trust, and then He fills us with His blessings. This is radical, this is shocking...because this is our Christian faith! It requires strength. But it's not our own strength, no...it requires strength from heaven.

So, who is blessed and who is cursed?

The Psalms today answered this way, "*Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.*" God loves us so much that He fills us with blessings when we trust in Jesus our Lord...it's that simple...it's that hard!

I've been poor and I've been rich...believe me, rich isn't everything it's cracked up to be!

And the Church says, AMEN!

Cycle A 1st Sunday of Lent

February 22, 2026

Gospel Start at 16:00

Homily Start at 18:11

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, GEN 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Reading II, ROM 5:12-19 or 5: 12, 17-19

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned -- for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions,

brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

Gospel, MT 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, you shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

I've been retired from work for 9 years now...I retired on the day my granddaughter Phoebe was born, so it's easy for me to remember how long ago it was. When People ask me what I like about retirement, I always say that "I like doing nothing." Actually, what I mean is that "I like not being over-scheduled." I try to schedule only one thing a day. If I do more than that, I start to feel the pressure of time. You see, I think time can be a problem for us. We live lives filled with multiple options, with many things to do and opportunities for any number of tasks. I mean who doesn't struggle balancing work and home activities? Sometimes, maybe most of the time, we have so many things to do we don't know which ones to tackle first. Yes, time can be a problem for us.

Our Catholic Church organizes time, not only according to calendar and the clock, but according to significant events: Ash Wednesday, Lent, the great Triduum, Easter, Pentecost, Advent, Christmas, Mary's Feast days, the saint's Feast days. The Church's Liturgical Calendar is her gift to us to be sure that, despite all that the world hurls at us, we might take some moments to celebrate these significant events.

The Greeks had two measurements of time: the word Chronos to denote time as clocks and calendars measure it. And, another carefully selected word, Kairos...moments in which we experience events of significance and meaning.

When we get married it is an event that occurs in Kairos time. Baptism is another such event. Our family photographs can take us out of Chronos time and put us into Kairos time...memories of events that fully and truly measure what has happened in our lives.

In today's Gospel we find Jesus in Kairos time. After His baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, Jesus did not immediately embark on His public ministry. Rather, the Holy Spirit led Him to a place where time was special. Jesus went out into the desert for forty days and forty nights to come to terms with who He was and what His life was meant to be...to be tempted by the devil and ministered by Angels...to understand what sort of Messiah-Christ His Father had called Him to be. This was for Him a time full of great significance and grace...it was Kairos time!

Jesus needed this time in the desert to have a clear understanding of just who He was when He had to face spiritually and physically disabled people in the days to come. Jesus needed to know Himself when He had to face down the religious and political establishments that would hunt Him down. We see that frequently He would take some Kairos time

from His Chronos time to go to deserted places to pray, getting back in touch with His Father in heaven.

Our forty days of Lent are much the same. These forty days are taken from our Chronos time so that we can get in touch with who we are, to answer what our lives are meant to be, as well as get more deeply in touch with our heavenly Father and His son Jesus. Lent is like a Pilgrimage in Kairos time...a significant time in which we can suspend Chronos time for a while. It's a way to fix our problem of time.

Here's an idea from Pope Leo XIV for Lent this year, "I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor. Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgement, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and cannot defend themselves."

We need to remember that:

- When we were conceived in our mother's womb we began to live in time.
- When we were born, we began to interact with each other in time.
- When we were baptized, we began a new lifetime living in relationship with God in time.
- When we were confirmed, we were blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be Jesus' hands and feet and heart in the world all the time.
- When we marry, we respond to the call to be the best spouse and loving parent we can be, all the time.
- And when we die – time for us does not stop, it only changes.

You see, here's the secret in plain sight: we don't have to be in Lent to enter Kairos time...our life is already in Kairos time...it's a series of moments in which we experience events of significance and meaning. When we use Lent to rekindle the blessed time we are offered, it is then that we will come to realize that we are always living in the Kingdom of God in Kairos time...

- a time of meaning and consequence, every day...
- a time of significance and grace with Jesus present in our lives, every day...
- a time to understand that we are here to love and serve each other, every day!

I thank the Lord there's people out there like you! Because of you, I know God loves us...because of you, I know that God loves me!

Did I mention that my granddaughter Phoebe was born 9 years ago?

It was Kairos time!

Cycle C 2nd Sunday of Lent

Reading 1 GN 15:5-12, 17-18

The Lord God took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be." Abram put his faith in the LORD, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness. He then said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as a possession." "O Lord GOD," he asked, "how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He answered him, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Abram brought him all these, split them in two, and placed each half opposite the other; but the birds he did not cut up. Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses, but Abram stayed with them. As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram, and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him. When the sun had set and it was dark, there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, which passed between those pieces. It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates."

Reading 2 PHIL 3:17—4:1

Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us. For many, as I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach; their glory is in their "shame." Their minds are occupied with earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord.

Gospel LK 9:28B-36

Jesus took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did

not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

The Scriptures on this 2nd Sunday of Lent celebrate that God loves us so much He reveals His divine presence in many ways. We need to open our hearts and see that God brings us salvation through Christ, but we also must be able to recognize the many ways He brings us to encounter the Risen Christ every day. Lent is the time for us to recognize in our ordinary lives how close His relationship is with us, how we should participate in the suffering of Jesus, and as the 2nd readings said, how we must imitate Christ through the examples of others.

In the 1st reading God initiated a covenant, a close and intimate relationship with Abram. He then sealed it with a sacred ritual to make it concrete, to make it official. We have our own Catholic rituals, but we must recognize Jesus' call to enter into His New Covenant many times comes to us in our ordinary events of life. We could be gazing at the night sky, looking into the eyes of a child, or hearing the news. No life is too simple....no life is too busy for God to encounter us.

In the Gospel today Jesus climbed a mountain to encounter God, as both Moses and Elijah had done before. While in prayer God's glory was revealed...Jesus was transfigured both from the inside (His face had changed) and on the outside (His clothing dazzled). He spoke with Moses and Elijah about His coming exodus in Jerusalem. His exodus...His "going out from," was not being treated as a tragic mistake to be avoided, but as an important part of God's salvation plan which included Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection and ascension. His closest disciples, Peter, James and John recognized the glorified Jesus. I remember my Scripture Studies teacher in Deacon Formation said that when PJ&J were with Jesus something very important always happened. Here, they were all taken into the cloud...a symbol of the hidden God...and a voice proclaimed Jesus' divine identity. But then, it was only after the actual events of Jesus's exodus, His suffering, death and resurrection, had occurred that they understand what happened on that mountain, and were finally be prepared to proclaim the Good News fearlessly.

Like the disciples, we may want to share in Christ's glory, but we can only do so by sharing in His suffering. Lent is the perfect time to enter into His suffering not merely by giving up something, but by sharing in the suffering of the Body of Christ. This Lent we see suffering has continued with the war in Ukraine for 3 years now...we see it in the trauma of children who have been deprived of an innocent childhood...suffering in parents who must raise their kids in the midst of violence and hunger and pain...in the empty eyes of the aged who often forget and too often themselves are forgotten. We pray that the glory of

God can somehow be part of these people's lives. What else can we do beyond charity?

We can imitate people who make the lives of others much better...Over the past 3 years many countries welcomed over 6.8 million refugees from Ukraine, including the US who admitted 270,000...many of whom came to Atlanta. Their integrity somehow strengthens us. Their compassion inspires us, and we feel God's love. Their endurance gives us confidence, and we understand God's mercy...How can we share in their suffering?

I remember one of my trips to Haiti when we went to the nutrition clinic that Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity run in the town of Hinche caring for over 100 children at a time. When desperate parents can no longer feed their children, they drop them off there. It is a place where we can go to see God's glory and share in someone's suffering. I saw someone scoop-up a youngster no more than 2 years old...and then he was told to put him down because he may have contagious scabies itch mites. Others in our group fed the babies laying in their little cribs...I couldn't do it myself...some were listless and puffed up from malnutrition...one with his head swollen from hydroencephalitis whimpered in his crib....but, most of the 30 or so babies in the room quietly looked at us with their big round eyes...none were smiling. I am still in awe of the good sisters and the grace of their Mother Superior...going there to meet the babies was a good step forward...how can we imitate their care of the poor?

Maybe it is easier for us to see God's glory revealed through the suffering of others...but Lent is also the time for us to step back to look and realize that we ourselves may be carrying a heavy burden that only Jesus can heal. How blessed we are to be in the caring community of St. Andrew...to be able to easily reach out for someone to listen and share our journey.

God is revealed in very ordinary ways...ways in which He is present...ways which lead to our salvation through Christ. Lent is the time for us to open our hearts and see the many ways we encounter the Risen Christ in our lives....by recognizing the glory of God around us...and yes, by even sharing in suffering of others. When we do, our lives will be changed forever!

Cycle C 3rd Sunday of Lent

Reading I, EX 3:1-8a, 13-15

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight and see why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your fathers," he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. But the LORD said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." Moses said to God, "But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' if they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?" God replied, "I am who am." Then he added, "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you." God spoke further to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. "This is my name forever; thus am I to be remembered through all generations."

Reading II, 1 COR 10:1-6, 10-12

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters that our ancestors were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all of them were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ. Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert. These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. Do not grumble as some of them did and suffered death by the destroyer. These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall.

Gospel, LK 13:1-9

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!” And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?’ He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”

What happens when we read of disasters and watch the devastation of the Ukraine war on television? Or, when we deal with painful tragedies with loved ones and friends? Do we ask: “Where is God?”, or “How can God allow these things to happen?” These are the same questions put to Jesus in today’s Gospel account because the Roman Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate...yes, the same one who later handed over Jesus to be crucified...had murdered a number of Jews in Jerusalem while they worshipped! He mingled their blood with the blood of their temple sacrifices. It was a horrible thing to do, to say the very least. Where was God?

Some say tragedies are God’s way of punishing us for our sins...justified punishment from God inflicted upon us for our sins. If so, then why do bad things happen to good people? ...people totally innocent who suffer terrible tragedies? Jesus makes it crystal clear that personal suffering and personal sin are not always connected. To be sure, many sins bring their own punishment with them...but too often the afflicted are not the sinners.

Suffering comes from many causes, some natural, but some suffering is compounded, if not caused by other people’s sins. A good deal of the pain and suffering that we endure in life comes from the sinful attitudes and activities found in other people, and above all people being indifferent. A whole lot of pain comes from those who have a “who cares?” attitude in what they think, say and do.

Pope Francis described Christianity as a religion that by its very nature must act for good, it is not a “religion of saying” made of hypocrisy and vanity. The Holy Father reflected on God’s reality and how fake so many Christians are when they treat the faith as though it were window dressing—devoid of obligation—or an occasion for self-gratification rather than an opportunity for service, especially to our neediest neighbors.

So, to be truthful, we are all sinners. If God were to directly link all suffering with our personal sins the world would not be habitable. We simply couldn’t survive; no one would be safe. But as it is, God is not absent from our world. As a matter of fact, He loves us so much that He has sent His only begotten Son into our world, not to condemn us, but to save us. God gave His son for the life of the world.

But we need to realize that the world will be saved only to the extent that we receive what God gives us to save our world. God offers and then waits for us to respond. To the extent that we do not respond, either because of refusal to surrender to God, or because of our indifference

and “who cares?” attitude...to that extent, the forces of evil and sin will enter into to fill the vacuum...and fill lives with more pain and suffering.

This is why to answer the original question “Where is God in all of this?”, Jesus tells us His parable about the fig tree. The owner had every right to expect the fig tree to produce, not to simply wave its pretty leaves in the air. When the master found this fig tree to be yielding nothing, he had a duty to eliminate that tree. But the response of the gardener in Jesus’ parable was extra tenderness, extraordinary care, and a range of “second chances” to get it to produce. You see, the question is not “Where is God?” the question rather is “Why aren’t we producing?” How are we glorifying God with our lives?

We too, have been put on this earth to produce the results for which God gave us life to produce. God has planted us in the midst of His love and grace. Our families and our friends love us in so many ways, our country provides the freedom to live and participate for good or bad, and our Church gives us awareness of God’s holy presence and His son Jesus Christ. God has offered us His tender, loving care in abundance. So how will we respond?

Will we just wave our pretty leaves in the air or will we feed the world’s hunger, care for those suffering from a tragedy, and help bring order out of the injustices in the world around us?

Did you notice that the parable of the fig tree had no real ending. It just sort of stopped. We don’t know what happened to that fig tree. The same is true for you and me. God has given us life and launched us out into our world with a script to follow along with a director, Jesus Christ, to guide us. But how our individual life stories are eventually written depends entirely on how we respond to what God has given us. And there is no doubt that a merciful God has spared us all, many times over, up to this present moment.

Pope Francis said, *“The mercy of the Lord goes out to meet those who dare to argue with Him...to argue about the truth, about the things one does or does not do...[God argues] in order to correct us. This then, is the great love of the Lord, this tension between saying and doing. To be a Christian means to do...to do the will of God – and on the last day – because all of us will have one – on that day what will the Lord ask us? Will He say: “What have you said about me?” “No,” Pope Francis said, “He will ask us about the things we did.”*

Cycle C 4th Sunday of Lent

March 26, 2022

Gospel Start at 15:20

Homily Start at 19:25

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, Jos 5:9a, 10-12

The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, they celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth of the month. On the day after the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain. On that same day after the Passover, on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased. No longer was there manna for the Israelites, who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

Reading II, 2 Cor 5:17-21

Brothers and sisters: Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Gospel, Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable: "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to

his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Have you heard the story about the priest and his rabbi friend commiserating about their problems with bats in the bell tower of the church and the attic of the synagogue? The rabbi admitted to shooting at the creatures which did nothing but put holes in the roof. The priest offered that this used to be a problem, but after he baptized and confirmed them, he never saw them again.

Every year we baptize and confirm many of our children. Some of us, I know, are concerned that we may not see them in church very much in the years to come. But I am not that worried...let me explain.

I don't deny that it seems like many young adults are walking away from the Church. But I am hopeful by what the Scriptures tell us today...that God loves us unconditionally as only a parent can...He waits for us...He comes to us to be in relationship with us...to make us a family. And the Risen Christ never stops reconciling us to God. He calls each of us to be His ambassadors, making His love a reality for our children, our families and in fact with everyone we meet.

You see, our extended families in all their wondrous shapes and sizes, in all their messy disfunction, are so very important. It's true whether we are married or single, with or without kids, relationships with our extended families, including close friends, are important to us. I think it's our faith in God, be it weak or strong, that bonds us together... they become the core of our faith community. We can't make our families believe. But we can give them many experiences of God-in-their-lives with our parental love...we inspire each other with our "ambassadors-for-Christ" love, as the 2nd reading said. Without our efforts, all the words in the world about God would fall on deaf ears.

It used to be easier, I think, to raise children who would stay in the Church. All we had to do was go to church and send them to Catholic school or religion class. 56 years ago, when Pat and I started dating, as a Presbyterian I quickly realized that I was being welcomed into a loving Chicago South-side Irish Catholic family...but I was also being welcomed into a special community. I immediately sensed that the daily involvement of their family and friends was bound together in a wide-ranging south-side Catholic faith community. It was so naturally an integral part of their lives with St. Germaine Church and school two blocks away, and the two Catholic High schools, Mother McAuley for the girls and Brother Rice for the boys, within a mile of their home.

Life today is more secular and, in many ways, more privileged than years ago...we have to make an extraordinary effort to seek out

relationships and participate in our faith community. But it's within this faith community that our conscience is formed...that we come to recognize all that God has provided us. We can experience the Kingdom of God here and now with its openness, acceptance and love for all people. Though they may experience "Church" differently than we do, with the help of the Holy Spirit our children...our extended families...can be nurtured to be active witnesses to the Gospel. The Risen Christ in His many forms will never stop reconciling us to God. He is an unstoppable force of love and forgiveness. And, yes, we may even have to experience the Eucharist as a verb, not a noun, when we are with our children and families. As a father of two sons who with their wives are now awesome parents living the Gospel in their own right, believe me when I say, "there's life after teenagers. In fact, there is life after 20-something and 30-something!"

That brings us to today's Gospel on this 4th Sunday of Lent. The Third character we meet in the Gospel parable is the father, who is the most important figure. You see, he went out to both his sons...it didn't matter what they did or said to him...he loved them just as they were. He was outside of the house waiting for the younger son to return. And, when the son appears his father runs to him, embraces him in his arms, kisses him, brings him in and throws a party for him. But not only does he come out of the house once, he comes out a second time to persuade the elder son to come in.

We need to strive to be like the compassionate father. In this parable it's the father's character and attitudes that we should use to measure ourselves, use to measure the capacities in our own hearts and souls to be Godlike in our love, compassion, care, and concern not only for our extended families, but in fact, for everyone. When people do come back to Church, I think they have already rekindled their relationship with God some time ago in a faith community. We need to ask ourselves, when they come to us, who will welcome them...The compassionate father or the crabby, judgmental, self-righteous older brother? I know who I met 56 years ago.

When I see people with the freedom to wander away from the Church, I can't help but think they are searching for what they are leaving behind...just like the prodigal son did. It may take years for them to return, but if we didn't do our very best to always welcome everyone, and above all, to always share with them the love of Jesus Christ, then I would be much more concerned.

As someone said, for young adults, God and the Church... and their parents...become invisible for a time and must be re-discovered all over again. If we trust in God and trust that the seeds of faith have been firmly planted, God may be ignored for a while, but He will not be easily discarded. And we must be confident that during their search, the re-discovery of the treasure of God is being nudged along in our family's hearts by the Holy Spirit.

You know, we were not told at the end of the parable whether or not the elder son went into the party. I think the years of close relationship, and mutual love the father and sons have for each other will win the day. That should encourage us to persevere in our relationships with God, and with our children and extended families. Only then will we really be ambassadors ready to help make Christ's love a reality for everyone we meet. And, maybe then, who knows, they will want to join us to get more of what we have.

Amen.

Cycle A 5th Sunday of Lent – 3rd Scrutiny

Reading I, EZ 37:12-14

Thus says the Lord GOD: O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land; thus you shall know that I am the LORD. I have promised, and I will do it, says the LORD.

Reading II, RM 8:8-11

Brothers and sisters: Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit, if only the Spirit of God dwells in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit dwelling in you.

Gospel, JN 11:1-45 or 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 33b-45

Now a man was ill, Lazarus from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair; it was her brother Lazarus who was ill. So the sisters sent word to him saying, "Master, the one you love is ill." When Jesus heard this he said, "This illness is not to end in death, but is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place where he was. Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just trying to stone you, and you want to go back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If one walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks at night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him." So the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved." But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So then Jesus said to them clearly, "Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us

go to him.' So Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, only about two miles away. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise."

Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the CHRIST, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary secretly, saying, "The teacher is here and is asking for you." As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and went to him. For Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still where Martha had met him. So when the Jews who were with her in the house comforting her saw Mary get up quickly and go out, they followed her, presuming that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him." But some of them said, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

So Jesus, perturbed again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay across it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, by now there will be a stench; he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out,

tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So, Jesus said to them, "Untie him and let him go." Now many of the Jews who had come to Mary and seen what he had done began to believe in him.

In today's Gospel, why did Jesus wait for two days after hearing that His beloved friend Lazarus was sick? What was the story about walking in the light of day really about? Why was Jesus so disturbed and troubled to the point of weeping? Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that He promised and then He did it. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."* Do we believe this? If so, then why do we have so many questions?

Did you know that when Catholic Churches, like St. Andrew, celebrate the OCIA Rite of Scrutiny, we read these Scriptures from cycle A for 3 Sundays, even when we are in Cycle B rotation of Scripture, like next year, or Cycle C in 2 years' time. 2 weeks ago we read the Samaritan woman at the well; Last week the man born blind was read; and today it's the story of Lazarus. The three Gospels represent a progression of themes from personal sin (of the Samaritan woman) to communal sin (of the people who berated the man born blind), to God's cycle of life-death-life (in the Lazarus story). The Rites of Scrutiny happening on Sunday are a major way that we the Church assist the OCIA catechumens in their conversion process during Lent. These ancient texts express the beliefs we hold true as Catholic Christians and through them we are handing on our tradition.

To scrutinize something means to examine it closely. But it is not us the community scrutinizing these catechumens; rather, each catechumen scrutinizes their own life and opens themselves for God to scrutinize them...and to heal them.

The elect, however, are not the only sinners in our midst who need conversion and transformation, are they? Each one of us are called to continue conversion and transformation throughout our lives. So we join with the elect in scrutinizing our own lives and praying to God for the grace to overcome the power of sin that still infects our hearts. We choose to reject evil and accept the salvation granted us through God's infinite love...not to earn His favor...we already have that...rather to express our gratitude by sharing His love by serving others.

The Scriptures today are about life and death. There are few things in our lives that will challenge and overwhelm our faith like death does. We think we have more time. When it strikes, even when we think we are prepared, it can crush us with sadness. It looks like death won. Grief is the most solitary human emotion I think we will ever have ...it makes islands of us all...It was no different for Jesus. When confronted with

death even Jesus became disturbed and deeply troubled as any human would. "And Jesus wept." This is a picture of Jesus we do not ordinarily see. He knew what was coming in the days ahead.

In today's Gospel, Saint John placed the raising of Lazarus at a crucial point in Jesus' life. He had performed 6 other miracles and was now on his final journey to Jerusalem. Unlike the other synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, in the Gospel of John, Jesus begins His Passion with the story of raising Lazarus. The sensation created by Jesus bringing Lazarus' back to life sets in motion the community's celebration on Palm Sunday...and then the leaders' condemnation that led to His brutal scourging and crucifixion.

But, as the 1st reading said, God promised and He did it ...He opened the graves and put a spirit into us so that we might live...His Holy Spirit dwelling within us since our Baptism gives us life. Jesus waited until there would be no doubt that Lazarus was dead. And then He raised him from death into life so that we would understand and believe that He is the resurrection and the life...that He is God always shining the light for us to follow.

(Rain Down softly begins playing)

On this 5th Sunday of Lent we are all asked to believe, to trust a promise made to us, that even though we suffer and die, we will come back to life in the love of Christ who is our resurrection. If we live and die in that belief, then it is with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; with the ancient prophets, Apostles and saints; with innocent people caught in war, taken in the prime of their lives; with lost souls who suffered without hope; with babies aborted or miscarried before they could live; with our loved ones who are gone, but not forgotten....with all of these people who we pray with daily...if we live and die in the belief that we live in God's love, nothing of their goodness and grace will be lost and forgotten in a grave somewhere.

In the OCIA process and as we age, our faith in Jesus becomes more fully developed...it enables us to confront physical death with a confidence that eternal life is not simply a pledge of resurrection on the Last Day sometime in the future. Jesus promises us that our God is not a God of the dead, but the God of the living. He knows and we believe that Eternal Life with God is a reality. We have no reason to fear death because God's love for us never ends! Death never wins!

Our God-given gift of faith and the Holy Spirit facilitate us to participate in life as the transformed Body of Christ with a very much alive, Risen

Christ...Yes, here in the Word of God, in Confession, with the Holy Eucharist from His Altar of consecration, and importantly, as His hands and feet and heart out in the world....wherever we go serving others, seeing His face in those who don't feel the love of God, in those who suffer without hope....Now, at this moment...His Kingdom exists...and will forever more! Because only God can transform death into life. He promised we would never die...and then...He made it happen!

And the Church says, AMEN.

(the choir/cantor sings Rain Down refrain twice)

Cycle A 7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 LV 19:1-2, 17-18

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy. "You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of you people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

Reading 2 1 COR 3:16-23

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: God catches the wise in their own ruses, and again: The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

Gospel MT 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

When Jesus declared *“You have heard it said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”*, He was not quoting the Jewish prophets from any of the writings found in the Old Testament. The command to hate your enemy is found nowhere in the Bible. He was quoting something from outside of the Jewish religion. Ancient legal systems prescribed punishments equal to offenses. A common expression was: *“an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”*

In today’s Gospel Jesus instructs His disciples to go beyond, to follow a higher law, a law not based on retaliation and retribution but based rather on a more powerful force to govern our human relationships – the Law of Love. We must be careful, however, to note that Jesus is not instructing His followers to let evildoers do whatever they please. To do nothing to confront evil is not the response Jesus wants from us. Christians must resist evil when it is encountered, but with a resistance to nonviolently break the cycle of violence. In the ancient laws of retribution violence was to be countered by violence of equal proportion. Jesus confronts evil with a power that transcends violence...God’s nonviolent love!

In Jesus’ teaching He went on to give His disciples the example of the debtor who, while standing before the judge, stripped off his cloak and his tunic and stood naked before this creditor who had dragged him into court demanding full repayment. In his shock, the creditor was covered with shame.

Nonviolent love is a powerful force that destabilizes and confounds the ways of the world. The norms of the world demand retribution and violent repression through the strict application of raw power, power that in many cases is falsely justified under the force of unjust laws. One cannot help but be reminded of the great nonviolent strategies and tactics pushing back on evil of Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and the Dalai Lama, to name a few.

Have you seen the Netflix documentary Mission: Joy? It’s a deeply moving and very funny masterclass on how to create joy in our troubled world as two Nobel Peace Prize winners have done. These unlikely friends, Archbishop Desmond Tutu the Christian activist who helped dismantle apartheid in South Africa, and the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist activist who has lived in exile since 1959. They have a remarkably joy filled story for us.

So, you see God’s love has no bounds. His love extends all of His creation, particularly to human beings. He has made every human being

in His image and likeness. The God of love cannot hate. People talk about being judged by a wrathful God, but maybe we should say at the very least that nothing God does supports evil or our sinful human deeds. Jesus' formula for overcoming evil does not include using evil. After all, using evil to overcome evil would only multiply evil, it would not divide it or reduce it to zero. Echoing God's boundless love, Jesus dying on His Cross cries out: *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* With His dying breath Jesus extends His loving forgiveness to those who have inflicted terrible evil upon Him. He is not a "wrathful God" who we need to fear!!

Non-violent love undermines hatred; it breaks the cycle of violence and tears down boundaries that bind us up in hatred. If there is to be judgement and retribution, let God hand it out on His terms. We are to be agents of God's love, never God's wrath. God is ever new, ever creating, and ever present IN us, and THROUGH us, and AS us, in real time. God filling us as God, is our source of love. We are to be agents of God's boundless, nonviolent love...sometimes in great ways, but mostly in small ways...a love that brings light out of darkness, meaning out of absurdity, and life out of death. God is the only One who can overcome evil and His ways can only be our ways, of course, when we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

So maybe a better response to family feuds and conflicted relationships, would be for us to figure out a loving initiative...to be the first to offer reconciliation or some other gesture of love. I gently pushed and prodded my sisters Lynne and Gail to reconcile after decades of accusations and hurt feelings...And believe me, when they reconciled a mere few weeks before Lynne's death, it was truly one of the greatest joys of their lives...and mine! And that only happened because God is in our lives!

Cycle B Palm Sunday

At the Procession with Palms – Gospel Mt 21:1-11

When Jesus and the disciples drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tethered, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them here to me. And if anyone should say anything to you, reply, 'The master has need of them.' Then he will send them at once." This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled: Say to daughter Zion, "Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them, and he sat upon them. The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." And when he entered Jerusalem the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?" And the crowds replied, "This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

At the Mass - Reading I Is 50:4-7

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them. Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Reading II Phil 2:6-11

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Gospel Mt 26:14—27:66

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over. On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, "My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples."'" The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?" He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born." Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" He answered, "You have said so."

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, "This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him in reply, "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be." Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you." And all the disciples spoke likewise.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane.....

... But Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit.

[Here all kneel and pause for a short time.]

And behold, the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth from their tombs after his resurrection, they entered the holy city and appeared to many. The centurion and the men with him who were keeping watch over Jesus feared greatly when they saw the earthquake and all that was happening, and they said, "Truly, this was the Son of God!" There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among them were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. But Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said, 'After three days I will be raised up.' Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, 'He has been raised from the dead.' This last imposture would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "The guard is yours; go, secure it as best you can." So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard.

Every year this Palm Sunday liturgy should leave us amazed as we pass from the joy of welcoming Jesus as he enters Jerusalem to the sorrow of watching him condemned to death and then crucified. If we let it, that sense of interior amazement will remain with us throughout Holy Week.

From the start, Jesus leaves us amazed. His people give him a boisterous welcome, yet he enters Jerusalem on a lowly colt. His people expect a powerful liberator at Passover, yet he comes to fulfill the Passover by sacrificing himself. His people are hoping to triumph over the Romans by the sword, but Jesus comes to celebrate God's triumph through the cross. What happened to those people who in a few days' time went from shouting "*Hosanna*" to crying out "*Crucify him*"? What happened was that they were following an idea of the Messiah rather than following the Messiah himself. They admired Jesus, but they did not let themselves be amazed by him. Amazement is not the same as admiration. Admiration can be worldly, since it follows our own tastes and expectations. Amazement, on the other hand, opens us to the newness that others bring. Even today, there are many people who admire Jesus because He said beautiful things; He was filled with love and forgiveness; His example changed history, They admire him, but their lives are not changed. To admire Jesus is not enough. We must follow in his footsteps, to let ourselves be challenged by him; to pass from admiration to amazement.

What is most amazing about the Lord and his Passover is the fact that he achieves glory through humiliation. He triumphs by accepting suffering and death, things that we would rather avoid. Jesus – as Saint Paul tells us – "*emptied himself... he humbled himself*" (Phil 2:7.8). This is the amazing thing: seeing the Almighty reduced to nothing. To see the Word who knows all things teach us in silence from the height of the cross. To see the king of kings enthroned on a cross. Seeing the God of the universe stripped of everything and crowned with thorns instead of glory. To see the One who is goodness personified, insulted and beaten. Why all this humiliation? Why, Lord, did you endure all this?

Jesus did it for us...to plumb the depths of our human experience, our entire existence, all our sin. To draw near to us and not abandon us in our suffering and our death. To redeem us, to save us. Jesus was lifted high on the cross in order to descend into the abyss of our suffering. He experienced our deepest sorrows, failures, loss of everything, betrayal by a friend, even abandonment by God. By experiencing in the flesh our deepest struggles and conflicts, he redeemed and transformed them. His love draws close to our frailty; it touches the very things of which we are most ashamed. Yet now we know that we are not alone: God is at our side in every affliction, in every fear...no evil, no sin, no stubbornness will ever have the final word. God triumphs, but the palms of victory

pass through the wood of the cross. For the palms and the cross are inseparable.

Today's Gospel shows us, immediately after the death of Jesus, a splendid icon of amazement. It is the scene of the centurion who, upon seeing that Jesus had died, said: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39). He was amazed by love. He saw Jesus die in love, and this amazed him. Jesus suffered immensely, but He never stopped loving. This is what it is to be amazed before God, who can fill even death with love.

During this Holy Week, let us lift our eyes to the cross, in order to receive the grace of amazement. As Saint Francis of Assisi contemplated the crucified Lord, he was amazed that his friars did not weep. What about us? Can we still be moved by God's love? Have we lost the ability to be amazed by him? Has our faith grown dull from habit. Maybe we remain trapped in our regrets and allow ourselves to be crippled by our disappointments. Maybe we have lost all our trust or even felt worthless. But perhaps, behind all these "maybes", lies the fact that we need to be open to the gift of the Spirit who gives us the grace of amazement.

Brothers and sisters, today God continues to fill our minds and hearts with amazement. Let us be filled with that amazement as we gaze upon the crucified Lord. May we also say: *"You are truly the Son of God. You are my God"*.

Cycle C Easter Sunday

Reading I, Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Peter proceeded to speak and said: “You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Reading II, I Cor 5:6b-8

Brothers and sisters: Do you not know that a little yeast leavens all the dough? Clear out the old yeast, so that you may become a fresh batch of dough, inasmuch as you are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Gospel, Jn 20:1-9

On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.” So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, but did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.”

This year we are embracing Easter in a year of celebrating extraordinary traditions of unity in the Church...2025 is a year where unusually most of Christianity celebrates Easter on the same Sunday, and 2025 is the 1700th anniversary of the momentous Council of Nicaea, and it's our Roman Catholic Jubilee year 2025. The great Council of Nicaea is where early Christians agreed upon their shared beliefs with the Nicene Creed.

Today, April 20, the alignment of lunar cycles that determine Christianity's primary Feast of Christ's Resurrection are the same in both the Julian and Gregorian calendars, so Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and most Protestants celebrate Easter today. Since 1582 however when the Roman Catholics adopted the Gregorian calendar, in most years the date of Easter varies widely between the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Our Catholic Jubilee tradition was started in the year 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII at a time when throughout the Christian world there was great suffering from wars and plagues, and a deep desire to return to a more holy way of living. When he announced Jubilee 2025 Pope Francis asked *"how can we fail to recall the various ways by which the grace of forgiveness has been poured out upon God's holy and faithful people?"* And so, this Easter morning, we join in the great celebration and joyous victory of eternal life over death.

We know well the Easter story of Christ's Resurrection, and yet can we ever fully grasp its meaning? Long ago someone said, *"we view Easter through the lens of Good Friday."* The struggles and pain in our own lives, especially death of a loved one, in many ways are more real and allow us to more easily identify with the cross of Christ. Intellectually we know death is the fate of all of us. Yet when it strikes, especially when it happens suddenly, it can crush us with sadness. Grief is the most solitary emotion I think we will ever have ...it makes islands of us all. Even Jesus wept. We are helpless to rise up out of the death that afflicts us. It looks like death won. For this very reason, we need to reflect on God loving us so much that He alone transforms death into life.

The Resurrection, in light of that death that afflicts us, isn't so easily understood, is it?...it makes things right, but how? I think, this is the dilemma that the closest friends of Jesus had in today's Gospel seeing the empty tomb. *"While it was still dark,"* they were still in shock from witnessing His death, and then they discovered His body was gone and the burial cloths were left behind. Life is so precious and death seems so final it was hard for them to process what the empty tomb really meant.

Even when we have the faith that eternal life after death is a blessing, it is not very easy to comprehend ...or embrace with joy.

The reality is that God loves us so much, Christ passed through death to Resurrection's eternal life so that all mankind also would pass through its suffering and death to the glory of a new life. There is no room for despair. Our faith does not rest on proof of what we see in death...it rests in our hearts with what we know is true. Our Easter faith shows us how God raises us up and renews our lives. He doesn't make us wait. Rather He showers us with the Holy Spirit to enable us to share His love here and now. His love never died, in fact, His love endures...forever.

The words of Pope Francis from his homily in 2020 are more meaningful and hopeful for me today. He said, *"If we want to be disciples of Christ, if we want to call ourselves Christians, [there] is only [one] way; there is no other. Having been loved by God, we are called to love; having been forgiven, we are called to forgive; having been touched by love, we are called to love without waiting for others to love first; having been saved graciously, we are called to seek no benefit from the good we do..."*

So you see, as Easter people when we refuse to surrender to the power of suffering and death, it's because our faith is in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ! As Easter people we respond to people in need because the Holy Spirit enables us to share God's love. Together, everything we do adds up...we make a difference in people's lives, in fact we change the world! It's who we are! As a friend told me, *"Real love is not about emotions; it's about acting for the good of all people."*

In his proclamation Hope Does Not Disappoint opening Jubilee 2025, Pope Francis calls us *"Pilgrims of Hope"* and called on us pilgrims *"to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us and to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think we are overwhelmed by evil and violence."* Pope Francis gave us 8 ways we can be agents of hope including: to *"desire for peace in our war-torn world."* ...to be *"open to life and responsible parenting"* ...to be signs of hope *"for our brothers and sisters who experience hardships of any kind"* ...to *"restore hope to prisoners"* ...to be signs of hope *"to the young, the elderly, the sick, the migrants"* ...to be hope *"for the billions of poor who lack the essentials of life"*

Today's Gospel is not so much about the disciples interpreting the empty tomb, but rather it's about God's gift of faith by which we leave the darkness and enter the light, the truth, the life, and the love of Jesus Christ's Resurrection. If we live and die in that belief that we come to

life in the love of Jesus, nothing of His goodness and grace will be lost and forgotten in a grave somewhere. Death didn't win.

And so we rejoice today on this Easter because our faith tells us that Christ passed through death to Resurrection's eternal life so all mankind also would pass through its suffering to the glory of a new life. God raises us up and renews our lives with His love! There is no room for despair on this Easter morning...let us join in the great celebration and joyous victory of eternal life over death.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad."

Jesus Christ is risen!! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Cycle C 2nd Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Reading I, Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the Apostles. They were all together in Solomon's portico. None of the others dared to join them, but the people esteemed them. Yet more than ever, believers in the Lord, great numbers of men and women, were added to them. Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them. A large number of people from the towns in the vicinity of Jerusalem also gathered, bringing the sick and those disturbed by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

Reading II, Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

I, John, your brother, who share with you the distress, the kingdom, and the endurance we have in Jesus, found myself on the island called Patmos because I proclaimed God's word and gave testimony to Jesus. I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see." Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lampstands and in the midst of the lamp-stands one like a son of man, wearing an ankle-length robe, with a gold sash around his chest. When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet as though dead. He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld. Write down, therefore, what you have seen, and what is happening, and what will happen afterwards"

Gospel, Jn 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and

put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.

He died on Easter Monday...9 weeks after being diagnosed with bronchitis on Valentine's Day. We buried him today on Easter Saturday. We knew him as Francis for only 12 years. He was a giant among our 266 Popes; and the most humble among men...he washed and kissed the feet of prisoners. He made us laugh when he told his dear friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka with whom he wrote the book On Heaven and Earth, "*Skorka, I came here to Rome, and they won't let me go back to Buenos Aires!*"...he never made it back home. Pope Francis revealed God's merciful love when he said, "*who am I to Judge?*" As the "pope for the people" he taught us how God's merciful love and peace is for the whole human family by visiting 68 countries, including 14 Muslim countries.

He taught us about God's infinite mercy when he pleaded for peace in his last address a week ago on Easter: "*...Sisters and brothers, especially those of you experiencing pain and sorrow, your silent cry has been heard, and your tears have been counted; not one of them has been lost! In the passion and death of Jesus, God has taken upon himself all the evil in this world and in his infinite mercy has defeated it.... Christ is risen! These words capture the whole meaning of our existence, for we were not made for death but for life. Easter is the celebration of life! ...I would like us to renew our hope that peace is possible! In Gaza... in Lebanon...in Syria, in Yemen, in Ukraine, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, in the western Balkans, in the Congo, in Sudan and South Sudan, in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, in Myanmar... May the principle of humanity never fail to be the hallmark of our daily actions. In the face of the cruelty of conflicts that involve defenseless civilians and attacks on schools, hospitals, and humanitarian workers, we cannot allow ourselves to forget that it is not targets that are struck, but persons, each possessed of a soul and human dignity.*"

Pope Francis told us that he took to heart the words of his friend Cardinal Hummes, who told him, "*Don't forget the poor.*" And so he chose to be named after St. Francis of Assisi, "*the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation...the same created world with which we don't have such a good relationship ...How I would like a church that is poor and that is for the poor.*"

Dear Pope Francis, we love you and are praying for you. Please, pray for us. Rest in Peace...Live in Peace!

Today is Divine Mercy Sunday, which is celebrated on the second Sunday of Easter. I am reminded of a Mass in 2021 which Pope Francis celebrated at the 16th century Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, which is the official Divine Mercy church in Rome. In keeping with Covid-19 health protocols the service was broadcast and only some 80 people were permitted within the Church for the Mass. They included male and

female prison inmates, nurses, disabled persons, refugees, migrants, and some ‘Missionaries of Mercy’ priests concelebrating with the Pope at the altar. He said in his homily some profound words of mercy and peace:

“...For if love is only about us, faith becomes arid, barren and sentimental. Without others, faith becomes disembodied. Without works of mercy, it dies...Let us be renewed by peace.... Let us ask for grace to become witnesses of mercy. Only in this way will our faith be alive and our lives unified. Only in this way will we proclaim the Gospel of God, which is the Gospel of mercy.”

The reality of today’s Scriptures is that God loves us so much that he raised Jesus from the dead so that we would not be unbelieving, but would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through this belief we would have life in His name. The question is “How will we respond?” Will it be like the people in the 1st reading who experienced miracles and then believed? Or are we like Thomas, having doubts about what others say and want to experience the Risen Christ for ourselves? Or are we like the Apostles in the Gospels, believers who don’t immediately recognize the Risen Christ in our midst? When will we believe and start acting like it? Thank God, Jesus is merciful and patient with us.

The Apostles and Pope Francis had great faith that conquered the world. But the Risen Christ is not only reserved for saints and holy people. Like them, we all can encounter Him and can be witnesses to the Risen Christ every day of our lives. If we only open ourselves to the experience and don’t let arrogance or our hard hearts get in the way, we will have numerous opportunities to experience Him and in fact be the Body of Christ to others. Thank God, Jesus is merciful and patient with us. Every one of us are invited into a deep personal encounter with Christ when we least expect it, in the most unlikely places, that shows us God’s merciful love brings us peace.

Easter 2010 was one of the last times I saw my friend Jack who had ALS. His breathing was much more labored, but he still told stories non-stop from his wheelchair. And, his hands were more knarled, but he could still hold a fork with a big spongy sleeve over the handle. And he could still grip the stem of a wine glass. Jack put it well, “*ALS can cripple my body, but the death of hope would cripple my spirit. Therefore, I hope in the Lord.*” Isn’t that what Easter is all about? We may have to face tough times, but we believe that God’s merciful love is greater than any suffering. Jack showed us that what can seem to be a dead-end terminal illness, is the miracle of eternal life waiting to happen. Jack was a remarkable man who was not only experienced the Risen

Christ transform his life with the power of the Resurrection, but he was also in fact the Body of Christ to others.

In all the Scriptures today, another fact is evident...people experience the power of the Risen Lord in the works of mercy the community does in the name of Jesus. Our faith needs a community of believers. It is only within the faith of the People of God, that each of us can come to believe. So the role of our whole community, extending beyond our St. Andrew Catholic Church, is crucially important. There are people everywhere who serve the needs of others in many ways: by caring for the children, the sick, and the elderly, by providing food for the hungry, teaching and leading faith communities, supporting the vulnerable, praying for others, or just being a friend. Look around in our pews today...we are surrounded by people who are the Body of Christ for others. Together we will help each other to believe!

Every one of us here can both encounter the Risen Christ and be the Body of Christ as our life intersects the lives of others...and we don't have to be saints or a Pope or even Catholic. We too have our Porticos of Solomon, our supermarkets, schools and ministries. We too can be the healing touch of Jesus in a world of suffering and violence. We too can be the reason others come to Christ.

Let us never forget how the Apostles, how Pope Francis, and how my friend Jack responded to God when they were called to become an instrument of His merciful love and a model of how to be merciful to others. When will we believe that we can live our daily life for others as the Body of Christ? It's up to each one of us to make every day Divine Mercy Day!!

Christ is Risen! Alleluia!Alleluia!

Cycle A 3rd Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2026

Gospel Starts at: 17:21

Homily Starts at: 21:16

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 ACTS 2:14, 22-33

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it. For David says of him: I saw the Lord ever before me, with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence. "My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption. God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured him forth, as you see and hear."

Reading 2 1 PT 1:17-21

Beloved: If you invoke as Father him who judges impartially according to each one's works, conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning, realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb. He was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time for you, who through him believe in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Gospel LK 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

"...they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive."

In today's Gospel, St. Luke wrote one of the best-known resurrection stories as a journey with Jesus. It contains many verbs describing movement: the going, drawing near, the walking ahead, vanishing, the returning. This is clearly a story about a journey...But it's not a only journey of the feet...it's a journey of the heart.

Two disciples, Cleopas and possibly his wife, are traveling home on Easter Sunday to Emmaus, 7 miles from Jerusalem...They knew about the crucifixion and death of Christ, and heard the reports that somehow, He was alive. But, they were returning home without yet hearing about encounters with the Risen Christ. We can imagine they were experiencing considerable fear and confusion: a mix of *"I never thought it would end that way"* and *"how could He still be alive?"* and *"what do we do now?"* These two fugitives appear to be utterly lost. But, it was precisely during their disorientated and off-course wanderings that Jesus journeyed with them right where they were.

Spiritual guru and best-selling author Barbara Brown Taylor shares in her book, An Altar in the World, how she learned to encounter God by embracing the sacred as a natural part of everyday life, and yes, even in suffering. She admits that being lost has happened to her many times: while setting out to be married and ending up divorced; while setting out to be healthy and ending up sick; while setting out to live in New England and ending up in Georgia. In the midst of her wayward wandering, she discovered that when she got lost, she found things that she would have never discovered if she had stayed on the planned path. Maybe most telling is her belief that getting lost is actually a spiritual journey. It's not a detour, but another path. It's not only a wound, but it is also a gift. It's not a place where God is absent, but rather a place of divine revelation with Jesus. She concludes, *"God does some of God's best work with people who are truly, seriously lost."*

We could say that is a pretty fair assessment of today's Gospel with the disciples adrift after their leader was crucified and with Him, their dreams were undeniably crucified as well. It's not clear whether they were intentionally moving toward something or simply escaping the Jesus-nightmare that had prompted their departure from Jerusalem. But, what changed them, reversed their flight into the unknown, transformed their loss to gain, and triggered the most famous U-turn in the Gospels was Jesus Himself.

When the Risen Christ encountered the two lost disciples on the road to Emmaus, He seemed at first to be a stranger until their hearts began to burn as He broke open the Scriptures for them. And then when they reached home, “...he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.” And finally, their eyes were opened...Jesus was alive! They couldn’t wait to return to Jerusalem to share their encounter with the Risen Christ and to find out that Jesus had visited many in their faith community as well. It sounds like the disciples went to Mass.

We pray that no matter what road we are on, no matter how lost we might be, that the gift of journeying with Jesus in our lives each day will help us discover God’s dream for us...our true treasure...God’s unconditional love!

[Rain Down begins softly playing]

Over the last several months countless people around the world have no doubt felt truly, seriously lost...they have been consumed by wars...it’s hard to hear that 56 wars and major conflicts are active in the world today! They have been praying for divine intervention. They have been begging for Peace!

Pope Leo, after a Holy Week in which he ramped up his “Peace” rhetoric, on Easter Sunday announced an uncommon prayer vigil for peace. So, on Saturday after Easter, after praying the rosary, Leo directly addressed world leaders on behalf of the

"millions and billions of men and women, young and old, who today choose to believe in peace, caring for the wounds and repairing the damage left behind by the madness of war."

His was a relentless appeal for world leaders to abandon the pursuit of power and to work for peace:

"Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war!" the pope said. "True strength is shown in serving life."

As followers of Jesus, we are seeing people across the globe being ravaged by war today. And yes, we believe Jesus is journeying with those poor lost souls. Pope Leo and all of our Church leaders and Father Juan have been asking us to listen and learn about what Jesus, the Gospels, and the Church teaches us about war and peace, because we

cannot gather under this cross, this image of suffering and violence, and believe that God only loves us. God loves all people...completely...He created us and stands in solidarity with all who suffer violence.

So, inspired by Pope Leo in this season of Easter renewal, we cannot forget those who are begging for Peace! We must serve life! At the end of Mass, Cullen Larson will tell us more about his workshop next Sunday after the 10AM Mass that will explain what the Catholic Church teaches us about war and peace in light of Jesus and the Gospel. Are we ready to listen and learn how our faith will grow when we stand in solidarity with those who suffer war?

Let me tell you a brief story about what some of us are questioning today. I was at a wedding yesterday and someone told me about a conversation they had with a friend. The friend said, "I wish Pope Leo wasn't so political." They responded, "He's not being political...he's repeating the Gospel." The retort came, "come on, we know the Old Testament is full of war with God on the side of Israel." At that point they agreed to disagree. BTW, at end of the evening, they hugged as they said goodbye. That's how we should always treat each other, even if we don't agree on everything.

If you have that kind of question, please come to the workshop next Sunday on war and peace, and ask it. You will hear that we Catholics need to learn much more about our Jewish roots to answer those questions. We need to know more about the background of the Church teachings, about history, and about the Bible, like reading the Prophets that Jesus spoke about in today's Gospel....we can't just read the Prophets beginning chapters about war's anger and hatred and power...we need to continue reading to the end to learn how the world's suffering is a journey where anger evolves to sadness and ultimately to God's compassion and peace. The Prophets are about how we all are interconnected and that God's divine and universal love is real.

Please ask Cullen about his time with Catholic Relief Services when he visited countries in Africa, Europe and Asia, war-torn and suffering from droughts and famines...and why the people everywhere said to him, *"Thank You for helping"*...and *"Don't forget us!"*

We pray, may our hearts burn as we recognize Jesus is our companion in all situations, in our joy and in our sorrow. And may we come to know, Jesus is the One who gives us eyes of faith to recognize God is in our lives, and to muster our compassion to live the Gospel building a world of Peace not war!

We pray, may all lost souls who need a life-giving U-turn from war, have us at their side caring for their wounds and repairing the damage of war...may they journey with Jesus, so He is no longer a stranger but is the One who they can come to recognize would never cause or justify the suffering of war, because He loves all of us, His own sons and daughters...

...And, the Church says, Amen!

[Choir sings refrain of Rain Down twice]

Cycle C 3rd Sunday of Easter

May 1, 2022

Gospel Start at 19:25

Homily Start at 23:30

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 ACTS 5:27-32, 40B-41

When the captain and the court officers had brought the apostles in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin, the high priest questioned them, "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name? Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and want to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus, though you had him killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of these things, as is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him." The Sanhedrin ordered the apostles to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Reading 2 REV 5:11-14

I, John, looked and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing." Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever." The four living creatures answered, "Amen, " and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Gospel JN 21:1-19

At that time, Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "we also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you

caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast. "And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like manner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to Simon Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Of all the scripture in the Bible, today’s Gospel speaks to me more than most. I have been a Catholic since I was 20 years old and for most of those years my mantra, my constant prayer, has been “I love you Jesus.” When I was discerning to become a Deacon, one day I heard the question, “do you love Jesus?” Immediately, I responded to myself saying, *“Well, yes, of course I do”* ...I continued, *“Then Fraser, put your money where your mouth is!”* ...I said yes to the Deaconate. A couple of years later I was about halfway through formation, and I distinctly remember hearing this Gospel and Jesus asking, “Do you love me?” I couldn’t help but put myself in Peter’s shoes...” Yes Lord, you know that I love you!” I couldn’t help but be affirmed that I was on the mission that He wanted me on.

The second part of today’s Gospel is Jesus’ speaking with his leading apostle, Peter, “the coward ...”the denier”. Many say this dialogue is Peter being forgiven by the Lord for denying him three times. But you notice Peter never asked for forgiveness and Jesus never forgives him. These verses are not about dealing with forgiveness as we know it when we say, “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” It’s not that. It’s much deeper.

Jesus takes Peter aside and he says to him three times, *“do you love me?”* And Simon responds, *“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”* So the key, you see is not in forgiveness...The key is in the love.

Each of us are born into this world with a deep and lasting hunger at the center of our hearts, and that hunger can only be satisfied by the love of God. There is more to forgiveness than asking for forgiveness or even saying I’m sorry. Jesus is reaching down into Peter’s inability to ask for forgiveness. And rightfully so. Peter was the leader, he was the one who was going to lead His Church and yet, Peter denied Him and swore and cursed. What he did was unforgivable. Peter had no right to ask for forgiveness because he had overstepped the boundary of betraying God Himself, viciously and out of fear and distress. So what exactly then makes this such a lovely Gospel?

Well, it’s Jesus reaching down into that basic yearning of every human being...He meets us right where we are. God reaches down...into the deepest part of our hearts, into our souls where the yearning for His love is born and stays with us no matter how many sins, no matter how many betrayals, no matter what we do. Jesus, in his great generosity, forgets everything else and reaches down and says to Peter...and to us: *“Feed*

my sheep...I love you, I trust you and now I ask you to take care of them for me." And when Peter hears that, three times, he knows that there is something here more than forgiveness. It is that Jesus loves us and forgets everything except his love for us...and, He has a mission for us! God wants Peter to continue to be the one who would lead His church...and, Peter is transformed to be a great witness of how a life of faith is lived for Jesus Christ, despite its trials.

And that's the lovely thing about today's Gospel. God tells us every day, *"you don't have to cry out for my forgiveness, for I have loved you from the beginning, and I will be faithful and true to that love...forever."*

Hearing about Peter in today's Gospel, including the ominous prediction of Peter's future death reminded me of our trip to Rome for our son's and daughter-in-law's wedding. I learned how St. Peter trusted God's will in his life and embraced God's love. On a tour of Christian Rome, we had visited four of the great Basilicas and were on our way to the catacombs. I asked our guide if we could visit the "Quo Vadis" church. He said it wasn't much of a church to see but immediately understood when I explained that I was a Deacon in the Catholic Church. The site of the small chapel-size church is on the Old Appian Way outside of Rome, near the catacombs where St. Sebastian is buried. The ancient church is built on the spot where legend has it that when Peter was fleeing for his life from Nero, he had a vision of Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, *"domine, quo vadis?"* or *"Lord, where are you going?"* Jesus replied, "I am returning to Rome to be crucified again." With that Peter knew what he had to do...he embraced God's love...he stopped running from death and returned to Rome himself... to lead...to be led where he did not want to go. In the church there are paintings on either side of the altar. On the right a painting of Christ crucified. On the left, one of St. Peter crucified upside down. Some say that he demanded to be crucified this way because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified the same way as Jesus.

Today's Scriptures are all about God's unconditional love. In response, let's commit with gratitude, "Dear Lord, we too, will feed your sheep. We too, will serve others. We too, will follow you and reach out to all the people around us so they will experience your unconditional love, as well."

I love you Jesus.

And the Church says: Alleluia!

Cycle A 4th Sunday in Easter

April 29, 2023

Gospel Start at 15:41

Homily Start at 17:32

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1, Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed: "Let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, my brothers?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.

Reading 2, 1 Pt 2:20b-25

Beloved: If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Gospel, Jn 10:1-10

Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the

voice of strangers.” Although Jesus used this figure of speech, the Pharisees did not realize what he was trying to tell them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, “What are we to do, my brothers?”

Today is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday because of today’s gospel from the 10th chapter of John. The image of the shepherd and his sheep is a very old one. We have seen the popular image of Jesus the Good Shepherd holding a lamb over his shoulders. Or the smiling Jesus sitting under a tree, with a little lamb on his lap. These images of the shepherd no doubt appealed to us from a young age because of the tenderness of Jesus, his care for the sheep and his compassion. How reassuring it is that Jesus is always there to support us on our journey through life. When we face difficult problems, or crosses come our way, or some personal disasters occur, the presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd reassures us that we are not abandoned, that Jesus loves us and supports us.

All that sounds so comforting and wonderful; He calls, He leads, and we follow. But what is a good life led by Jesus? *“What are we to do, my brothers”* in this world of ours? A world of total violence, where so many are suffering and dying. First, we should recognize that our faith in Jesus the Good Shepherd is not the same today as it was when we were children. We need to go to the margins and encounter the vulnerable and needy to understand what Jesus loving us truly means. Maybe we should ask what prevents us from having a good life? Definitely our egos, our pride, greed, and anger, and our violence or how we help destroy the environment. But the flip side can also be a problem...we sometimes have a problem of just being nice. It’s easy to be nice... history is filled with nice people looking the other way... in the ancient Roman Empire... in the Jim Crow South... in Nazi Germany...or today, in a world filled with violence. You see unfortunately, sometimes we are bystanders walking by the cross, minding our own business, not allowing ourselves to close enough to be “cut to the heart.” But as we heard in the 2nd reading: *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps”* So we need to open ourselves to be “cut to the heart”...to be moved to act as Jesus did, non-violently to relieve suffering, to oppose injustice and violence. It's not okay to say, I'm going to be a nice person, and lead a good life just being good. That is not good enough. A good life is not an easy life. It's not about being comfortable, it's not about making money or being successful. So, how do we live a good life in a world with wars raging in 32 nations, 13,000 nuclear weapons, and billions of people dealing with subhuman poverty,

and with the repercussions of racism, gun violence, hunger, catastrophic climate change? I could go on and on. Well, living a good life is as simple...and as difficult...as loving one other...as actively working every day of our lives to love others...taking it to heart to make the world better for others, especially those at the margins...those in need.

Today's scriptures tell us who Jesus is, but they also tell us who we are all called to be. That's why the readings today are intimately linked to another name we have for this Sunday. 60 years ago, Pope Paul VI launched this 4th Sunday of Easter as Vocations Sunday, a day on which we pray for vocations of all people of God. Everyone should know that God loves us, that He is calling us and that He has a plan for each of us.

I have to tell you a brief story that happened to friends of mine, Mark and Susan, when they were "cut to the heart." Mark received a call early one morning from his friend in Denver. A woman was flying to Atlanta that day who needed some help. Anna made the hazardous journey to Arizona from Guatemala with her two children and was seeking asylum. Gangs had taken her house and threatened to abuse and kill her children. She was being allowed to reunite with her husband who she had not seen in 12 years...he was here working and sending money to his family for them to survive. Without hesitation Mark jumped into action; he located an interpreter and they took 3 ½ hours to locate her at the airport...she had not eaten for 2 days...Anna's husband was in Toccoa, GA, and her two kids somehow had already arrived there, so they took her there. It was an exhausting day for my friend...he said imagine how exhausted Anna and her family were after months of daily stress getting here. When Mark got home, Susan apologized saying this was all her fault. She admitted to praying in bed that morning that she wanted to do something about the suffering immigrants at our borders. Mark said God missed zapping her that day and chose him to do His work. 😊 I'm pleased to report that after 5 years, Anna, her husband and children are documented and thriving as a family in Charleston.

We know there is a shortage of priests and religious, but it is not only for them that we pray on this Vocations Sunday. We pray for all of us because we all are people who lead others to experience God's love. We must expand the term vocation to include all of us. As the 1st reading said, *"you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call."* In fact, every one of us probably has multiple vocations, as we are being called by God to be spouses, parents, caregivers...to be teachers, plumbers, civil servants...you name it. These

are callings which not only demand fidelity to Jesus the Good Shepherd but also demand that we embrace our vocations. God is calling every single one of us to work for the Gospel with great love every single day. When we are “cut to the heart”, there’s no doubt that Jesus is calling and we are following. When we pray about it, God will tell us what He wants us to do. Come Holy Spirit.

So, what’s holding us back, what are we afraid of? Do you know what Jesus said? Go and read about Jesus, and what's the one thing he repeatedly said to His disciples? *Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.* because His disciples were terrified. All of us need a teacher to say, you don't have to be afraid. Jesus never said “life will be easy”...He said, “I will be with you always. I love you. Do not be afraid.”

Did you ever hear the legend of the rich man who visited a great cathedral while it was being built? He saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, “Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.” And the workman replied, “Because God will see it.”

As each of us are carving tiny birds of love into the “great cathedrals” that we are building in our lives...we will not be seen if we are doing it right. One day, however, it is very possible that the world may marvel at what we have created here at St. Andrew... may they see a caring and inclusive community who changed the world for the better. And it will be in the great love that has been added to the world by the un-noticed work we do and sacrifices each of us made to make the world better for others...that is what Jesus Himself will see. He called, He leads and we follow. Do not be afraid to be “cut to the heart.” When we pray about it, God will tell us what He wants us to do. Come Holy Spirit. ...Amen! ...Alleluia!

Cycle B 4th Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 ACTS 4:8-12

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: "Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

Reading 2 1 JN 3:1-2

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Gospel JN 10:11-18

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

Years ago, not even a year into my career, I knew I didn’t want to be an electrical engineer for the rest of my life. I came to realize that two things did interest me however: high-tech Marketing and creating successful products. And so, I embarked to be a student of Management and got my MBA in Marketing before I was 30 years old. Over the years my absolute favorite jobs have been leading Product Management teams creating innovative, and valued products and services. The engineers thought I was a salesman, and the salesmen thought I was an engineer. But as strange as it may sound, it wasn’t until later in my career that I came to realize that I should not have focused so much time on being a student of Management...of reading all those books about corporate management. I should have been much more a student of Leadership and taken more time to nurture relationships with leaders around me. And it took me more than a couple of years to understand that we Deacons are called to “lead from the second chair”...and, it’s not the Bishop or Pope in the first chair, or my wife, if you know what I mean. Today’s Gospel is a great lesson explaining just that.

Back in Jesus’ time everyone knew about shepherds, and how shepherds and sheep interacted with each other. Not so much today. Few of us have ever watched shepherds tending sheep. But if we think of shepherding as leadership, we can get a better grasp of what that means for us in our time. Today Jesus is telling us that shepherding and leadership have similar dynamics in our relationships with others, particularly in caring for others as God would have us.

The shepherds of our day, to name a few, are parents and grandparents, coaches, teachers, clergy, and possibly even managers and executives where we work. If anyone is placed under our supervision or care, then we are in the position to be a Shepherd. God loves us so much that He wants us to be the best Shepherds we can be.

Good Shepherds want those who are in their charge to succeed, to grow in competence, and to advance. Their own success is found in the success of those under their supervision.

Good Shepherds have sound character. They stand for something and exert a positive influence on others. Good leaders make choices knowing that they will be accountable to others as well as accountable to themselves.

Good Shepherds continuously form their consciences with God so that they will know what is right and what is wrong. Good Shepherds know their own limitations. They are people who are comfortable with and at peace with themselves. For Shepherds it's not about them; it's about those in their care.

I could easily go on, but the effective shepherding and leadership skills I have pointed out today, you may have noticed are more spiritual than worldly. They are skills based on Pope Francis' attitude and approach to his relationship with people around the world. He recognizes that we all are the Children of God...even those outside our fold, our church, our race, our tribe. Pope Francis is evidence that Good Shepherds are Good Leaders... and Good Leaders are Good Shepherds...you see, he too recognizes that it's Jesus in the first chair.

In his years as our Pope, Pope Francis has been calling us to serve a purpose greater than ourselves...to get over self-interests and devote ourselves to the concerns of others....to be Shepherds...to be Christian Leaders. That means we can't sit in the pews of our own sanitized environments. Good Shepherds smell of the sheep and immerse themselves in the mud of human failures, human sins and human problems...even to others who may not belong to our fold. As Pope Francis frequently says, Jesus sends us out to the peripheries of human life, to where people are living, to understand what they are going through before we can offer any solutions that will matter. I mean, how can we help others until we know what help they truly need? And how else will they hear the voice of Jesus?

If you want to experience what I've been talking about, volunteer at a food pantry to meet people in dire need...or a prison ministry to lead a bible study in a very dark place...or join me to form a Haiti ministry here at St Andrew to reach out to our brothers and sisters who have lost hope....you may surprise yourself to find that Jesus is already there and that you are helping others discover that as well!

When we devote our efforts to all of those who God has placed in our lives, in our care, to help them develop and succeed in all their endeavors as they journey through life, then rest assured they will know Jesus is active in their lives. When we treat each person in our lives as a uniquely dignified individual, a person made in God's image and likeness, beloved by God and precious in His sight.... that is when we will have become better Christian Leaders...and the very best Shepherds that we can possibly be!

Cycle C 5th Sunday of Easter

May 18, 2025

Gospel Starts at 16:36

Homily Starts at 17:27

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 ACTS 14:21-27

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lysira and to Iconium and to Antioch. They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, "It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. "They appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith. Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now accomplished. And when they arrived, they called the church together and reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Reading 2 REV 21:1-5A

Then I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, or the old order has passed away." The One who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

Gospel JN 13:31-33A, 34-35

When Judas had left them, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and God will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

“...He had opened the door of faith...”

In today's first reading, we heard from St. Paul and his sidekick Barnabas telling us some of their many stops on their first missionary journey. Their travelogue, however, seems quite uninspiring ... They called the church together, but I wonder if they kept the church's attention. There were no dazzling reports of how the mighty God split open the heavens or showered down tongues of fire to smote their enemies. Instead, they said God had opened a door...the door of faith. We can almost hear the community yawning.

It might be surprising to discover that door opening, that door attending, that door hospitality was actually an ancient ministry of the church...a minor priestly order that went by the name of “porter.”

Every candidate for priesthood before 1972 received this lowest of minor orders, and though officially abolished by Pope Paul VI, it reemerged as our Hospitality Ministry, embodied in our women and men at St. Andrew who unlock and open the doors, and who prepare a welcoming environment. I am not always sure we say “thank you” enough to our volunteers and staff who at this and every Eucharistic celebration prepare the gifts of hosts and wine, who light the candles, and who open those doors saying “Good Morning”... they all welcome us home. So let us say to our St Andrew ministers of Hospitality...Please will our Sacristans stand, our altar servers, our ushers and our staff, stand. A big THANK YOU for your often overlooked, and yet so gracious and timely ministries! [applause]

Door opening is a good way to interpret the commandment Jesus gave us in today's Gospel, *“love one another.”* “Love” can be such an overused, easily weakened word we too often reduced to a “heart” emoticon in a text message. The love of which Jesus speaks about, however, is not an emotion but a way of life that acknowledges and respects the dignity of others, whether friends, or strangers, or foe. Jesus' new commandment *“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another”* takes seriously John's revelation in the 2nd reading that God's dwelling is with the human race, not with one nation, one religion, or one ideology. God dwells with the whole human race...all human beings are worthy of respect and dignity and love.

I have to confess that recently I have been rather pessimistic. I've been thinking how tragic it is that in today's world opening doors seems to be out of favor. Everywhere we look there seems to be much more door slamming...whether it is slamming the door on our moral integrity, refugees fleeing war, on immigrants, on food and healthcare security, on

environmental protection, on international cooperation, or slamming the door on even common decency. I kept thinking, “Where’s the love-one-another?... The world is blind, we need to help them see!”...and then our new Pope was elected!

With all the talk about the conclave, I was surprised to hear there were 3 Cardinals in Chicago. I grew up in Chicago and we have many family and friends there, so of course I knew about Cardinal Blaze Cupich and our former Archbishop Wilton Gregory, now retired Cardinal Gregory. But a 3rd Cardinal? Even when I heard his name, Cardinal Robert Prevost, I never heard of him before. Well now I know some of my friends in Chicago actually know him...they call him Father Bob....and the world now calls him Pope Leo XIV...even our non-Catholic friends are excited! I soon came to know he has strong personal bonds both here and far beyond the United States. Like all of us, he came from immigrants; his Haitian, Cuban, and Creole Black heritage in the “*cultural gumbo pot*” of Louisiana was traced back to 1850. Pope Leo spent only a third of his life living in Chicago. He is truly a Pope of the Americas, South and North Americas, with dual citizenship in Peru and the United States. He was a missionary Pastor who served the poor in the remote trenches of the Church for decades. I also must mention, Pope Leo is an Augustinian who follows St. Augustine’s spiritual ideals of God’s love and mercy in unity, harmony, friendship, charity, and service.

During the conclave I was concerned when I heard the Cardinals really didn’t know each other. They were from distant lands around the globe. But Cardinal Prevost was the perfect fit for a conclave which recognized we are a church seeking to love one another...in unity, harmony, friendship, charity, and service...And, as it turns out, many Cardinals did know him because of his leadership in the influential dicastery of bishops. Bishop and then Cardinal Prevost was Pope Francis’ advocate by elevating clerics with a pastoral approach focusing on the poor and having open doors (there are those open doors again!). They practiced inclusion as Pope Francis said, “Todos, Todos, Todos...Everyone, Everyone, Everyone!”

The clinchers for me were his first words as Pope, the first words of the Risen Christ: “*Peace be with you,*” and then learning why he chose Leo XIV as his name. His namesake Pope Leo XIII is known as the “Father of Social Justice” for his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, “on Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor.” This work established a body of teaching in response to “*the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class*” during the industrial revolution of the late 1800s. It has shaped Catholic Social Teaching ever since.

So now, we have a Pope! Leo, a Pastor with a gentle manner and with *“the smell of the sheep”* on him from serving the poor for decades in remote trenches. A multi-lingual and engaging bridge builder known by many in the Church, and now across the world. Pope Leo XIV, a Door Opener and practitioner of Catholic Social Teachings! This election had to be made by the Holy Spirit! God Bless our Pope Leo...[applause!]

(“All are Welcome” is softly played)

At the beginning of this morning’s Mass, we happily sang the wonderful song “All Are Welcome” ... Now as Jesus’ real presence in Word and Eucharist pierces us to the core, and prepares us to serve others in the world, let us each, in our own way take up the utterly mundane task of being Door Openers. May we become Jesus’ own “porters” day in and day out so that everyone will be inspired to respect and dignify and love others who intersect their lives...this is how we all will come to recognize that the Risen Christ is dwelling with all mankind...throughout the world. God’s love and mercy is for everyone!

“...He opened the door of faith...”

And the Church says...AMEN!

Cycle A The Ascension of the Lord

Reading 1 ACTS 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus did and taught until the day he was taken up, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While meeting with them, he enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak; for John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

When they had gathered together they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered them, “It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him from their sight. While they were looking intently at the sky as he was going, suddenly two men dressed in white garments stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven.”

Reading 2 EPH 1:17-23

Brothers and sisters: May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might, which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens, far above every principality, authority, power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things beneath his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way.

Gospel MT 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

He said, "Go...I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Today's Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much the Risen Christ is forever present to us, His Holy Spirit-filled community of believers, the Church, the Body of Christ. Because of that, we are secure in what we have and confident in what we have been given.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta celebrates the Ascension of the Lord today the 7th Sunday of Easter rather than last Thursday, so we don't overlook the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and His return to God's glory. The readings span his life recalling all that He did for us in His teaching and suffering, and that he commissioned us to spread the Good News "to the ends of the earth."

But as the readings summarized the life of Jesus, they also touched on our human weakness. The Gospel said that when the eleven saw him, *"they worshipped, but they doubted."* They believed but didn't know how to respond. They knew oppression from the empire. They knew life can disappoint and hurt us all. Unfortunately, all too often this is our own situation as well. We believe in God but fail to call on him. We rely on ourselves but then become frustrated when things don't go our way. But we must recognize something else in the Gospel...it didn't end in doubt...it ended with Jesus pushing the disciples into the world, empowered with the Holy Spirit!

Jesus takes our doubt and transforms it with His authority and love. He empowers us with the Holy Spirit and then commissions us to spread His Good News as spirit-filled members of His Body, the Church. He loves us so much that He includes us in His plan. Now that's a scary thought. You and me responsible for carrying on His plan. I could easily doubt that. I could give you a hundred reasons why that wouldn't be possible. But He is with us...His Holy Spirit is in us...He feeds us with His body and blood at every Mass....we will never fail when we let Him into our lives...when we put Him at the center of our lives, we will constantly do small works with great love building up his kingdom one-on-one, one person at a time, with the people he puts in our lives. Jesus never said life will be easy...

He said, "Go...I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Cycle B Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2024

Gospel starts at 20:48

Homily starts at 22.13

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, Acts 2:1-11

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

Reading II, 1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13

Brothers and sisters: No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Gospel, Jn 20:19-23

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

“Lord send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

Today, on this feast of Pentecost we mark the end of the Easter season and celebrate Jesus sending the Holy Spirit into the world. Today’s Responsorial Psalm is a familiar prayer: *“Lord send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”* When we repeated it, however, I wonder if we were reminded of our role in it. You see, God loves us so much that He breathed His Spirit into us to fill the earth with His love and His power. When we are open to the Holy Spirit prompting us to act, the earth is renewed, forgiveness is granted, peace is restored and Christ is alive in our midst. It’s exciting!! It is a little bit of Heaven here on earth. And invariably it is **NOT** what we had planned...but, we need to trust Him and respond to His call, nonetheless.

Today St. Paul tells us in the 2nd reading that each of us has different spiritual gifts and different forms of service...but it is not enough to be followers of Jesus gathering at Mass while we plod along in our ordinary lives. All of us here are on a journey with God, and we are each at a different place in our relationship with Him. Surely, we don’t just come to Church to observe or consume some blessings for lives empty of grace. No, we come so God can meet us and whisper to us right where we are...We come as St. Paul explained to the church in Corinth, despite their immoral and anything-goes culture. We come in our diversity to drink of the one Spirit...We are called to worship God and to celebrate all the grace-filled moments in our lives... we are called to actively become better servants and Apostles of Jesus by serving others.

Do you remember last year when Father Juan returned from his El Camino pilgrimage in Spain? He truly was renewed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Someone told me that we at St. Andrew need an El Camino experience. I know most of us couldn’t walk 10 or 20 miles a day, but I had an idea to form a pilgrimage to visit sacred Catholic sites in Portugal and Spain that most of us could take part in. And so, a year from now we’re going on a pilgrimage. Save the Date next year: June 2025...30 of us from St. Andrew will listen to the whispers of the Holy Spirit and encounter the Risen Christ in Portugal and Spain. We will travel on a motorcoach roughly following the “Camino Portuguese Coastal” trail by visiting towns between Lisbon and Santiago de Compostela. And yes, we will have the chance to walk on the El Camino trail. Keep an eye open for bulletin announcements and a presentation in early July covering the pilgrimage details.

“Lord send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

We shouldn't be surprised when the Holy Spirit calls us. Everything positive we do adds up, even the small deeds, and like the Apostles, prepares us for even more. As the 2nd reading says, *"to each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."* Each of us has different gifts and He whispers to us to perform different service, but we are called by the same Holy Spirit, for benefits that sometimes only He knows.

Each one of us needs to understand how significant we are in God's great plan and how we play an important role in the lives of those around us. The way we deal with life is significant and important for those who know us. Life can be unfair. Life can be difficult. Life can bring suffering with it... sometimes a lot of suffering. How we deal with it will be very significant to any number of people who know us. But life has its joys, too. Life brings good fortune and happiness as well. How we handle success, along with the generosity in our hearts, can be of great significance to people who know us. How we uniquely handle both success and suffering do have a significant impact on others.

"Lord send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth."

You know, we may never know what significance we have in the hearts and souls of people who know us. We many never know how our faith has built up the faith of those around us... especially members of our family or our close friends. We may not realize what God is doing with our life. But God knows...He knows our importance, our significance, even though we may not realize it ourselves.

Today we are honoring a significant man, David Peter Pozzetta. He was a man who recognized how important his Catholic faith was, and how blessed he was being a part of our St. Andrew community. So, he decided to bequeath a gift of over a million dollars to St. Andrew! No doubt, Mr. Pozzetta had a BIG heart for others. A heart that that BIG didn't just grow over night. It grew that BIG because during his 85 years here on earth the Holy Spirit and the Risen Christ were active throughout his life. I'm sure he never fully comprehended the significance he had in the hearts and souls of the people who knew him...none of us do. And I wonder if he had any idea how his faith would build up the faith of us here at St. Andrew as we continue to benefit each year from the additional endowment fund gift he gave us as a lasting legacy. So today, we honor Mr. Pozzetta with a lasting tribute: after Mass we will dedicate our plaza at the front of the church in his name, Pozzetta Plaza. May the generations of St. Andrew's parishioners remember him, bless him, and serve others to honor him far into the future.

We here live privileged lives...St. Andrew is debt free! Let us leave this celebration with generous hearts to go in peace, sent by Jesus, glorifying God with our lives as servants and Apostles of Jesus... glorifying God as we hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit in the unmerited, grace-filled moments of our unique and special lives. Whether it is on a pilgrimage, or here at Mass, or walking across our Pozzetta Plaza, or living a legacy of serving others, we will have many opportunities to hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit. That's how we will come to know Jesus and love Him...and that's how we will be empowered to flood the earth with His love and mercy and grace to serve others.

“Lord send out Your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.”

Cycle B The Body and Blood of Christ

June 2, 2024

Gospel starts at 20:41

Homily starts at 22.54

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, Ex 24:3-8

When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the LORD has told us." Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do." Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

Reading II, Heb 9:11-15

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

Gospel, Mk 14:12-16, 22-26

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you,

carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Today's Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ celebrate the unconditional love Christ has for us. We see two portraits in today's scriptures of the self-sacrificing Savior: First, we see Jesus offering His own unblemished self for our sins, bringing His own body and blood once for all to obtain our eternal redemption. Then, He prepares a generous banquet to feed us the special Bread of companionship and the Holy Blood of the new covenant...a meal that we will dine on for all of eternity. The Body and Blood of Christ, Eucharist, truly is a sacrifice and it is food from Heaven, and it is also the gift of encountering the real presence of Christ in our lives...it is an active experience of the Kingdom of God here and now...and it is always more.

Eucharist is the "Source and Summit of our Christian Life"...But we must remember that this sacrament is the culmination both of God's actions and our actions...God blessing the world in Christ's actions, and our actions not only of worship, but most importantly, our actions of sharing His love, mercy and forgiveness with the world.

So, you see, Eucharist can be called a verb, it is not just a passive noun. It's THE action of Christ truly present in our lives. Actually, there are four actions: Take, Bless, Break, and Give. These sum up and embody Jesus. These are the actions we are commanded to do in Jesus' memory and so our celebration of His Body and Blood embodies these same four actions... nothing is left to chance.

In a few minutes at the Presentation of the Gifts, our gifts of bread and wine are Taken. They represent the gifts of Jesus' life. In the Eucharistic Prayer, the gifts we offer are Blessed – the bread, the wine, being Blessed to become the Body and Blood of Christ. In the Fraction Rite the bread is Broken and the cup poured out. In Communion the Body and Blood are Given that we might become more truly who we receive...Given by Christ to benefit the whole world. So you see, Eucharist is not some-thing, Eucharist is some-one acting in our lives...Christ Himself!

But you know we are not merely watching the priest do these actions. We are acting as well and then glorifying God with our lives. We are remembering Christ's offering in a very Jewish way: it's as if we are there at the one sacrifice for all, not merely recalling or recreating His sacrifice. We are offering ourselves to be Taken by God, Blessed by God, broken open and poured out by God, and then Given by God in love to the whole world. Jesus said, "*Take it; this is my body.*" We do this by joining ourselves to Christ so that we will be transformed into His hands and feet throughout the world. As St. Augustine said, "*Be*

what you can see, and receive what you are.” ... “Be what you can see and receive what you are.”

Truly this is amazing. God loves us so much that He invites us to join our lives to His. We don't come to celebrate Eucharist to merely get something. We come so we can BECOME someone who we are most deeply called to be. We celebrate His Body and Blood to put on the mind and heart of Christ. You know, if we ever say about Mass, “I don't get anything out of it,” we are missing the point entirely...people, we are here not only to receive something...we are here to give ourselves to be changed by Jesus Christ Himself.

Eucharist is infinitely more than a moment when a bell rings during the Eucharistic Prayer. It is infinitely more than a private “me and God-in-the-host” moment. It is infinitely more than adoration and devotion as those are traditionally understood.

When Eucharist is understood as these four actions, I think it becomes obvious what it means to be the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts are presented by and then to those who are fully initiated in this Communion with God. And, we present our lives to be offered with Christ, and then we receive back our transformed selves...We proclaim our AMEN realizing who we are becoming and the responsibility that this entails! This is what full, conscious, and active participation in our Eucharistic celebration means.

Eucharist is a choice to do something...to take action...to fully, consciously and actively participate in connecting ourselves with Christ...to be Taken, Blessed, Broken open and Given out in love every, single, day...to everyone. To celebrate Eucharist is an amazing and radical life changing activity because the truth is, God will change us in ways beyond our imaginations!

As St. Augustine said, *“the Amen’ we say at Mass must ring true in our lives.”* Imagine how our Church and our world might be changed if we all participated this way!

A few years ago, Pat and I spent the weekend at my sister's house on Lake Hartwell. We ended up attending their non-denominational church service. As we were leaving, I mentioned how I thought it was a very “Catholic” sermon Pastor Mark gave. Especially the part where we are commanded to care for the widows, the single moms, and care for the orphans, and care for the sojourners, the immigrants, and care for the poor. “Now I know what you are thinking,” he said. “Pastor Mark this sounds like a very liberal agenda. But I have to stop you right there.

God's commandments are neither liberal or conservative. Let me tell you if we are thinking that way, we are bringing God's way of thinking down to our human way...a misguided way. Pure and simple, God's way is love, not a political agenda." Well, that was a very Catholic Social Teachings sermon if I ever heard one. But what really surprised me was how we had several brief discussions about Pastor Mark's sermon during the rest of the day... You know, I can't help but think how we glorified God that weekend by sharing Christ's love, mercy and forgiveness in moments when we were vulnerable telling our stories and even sharing how we have been deeply offended by loved ones...(I mean, how Eucharist can you get!)

How Blessed we are to be called to this table. How Blessed we are to be able to celebrate the Body and Blood of Christ so frequently, and to taste the Kingdom of God. How Blessed we are to be the Body of Christ sharing His love, mercy and forgiveness with the whole world!

AMEN!

Alleluia!

Cycle A 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Jer 20:10-13

Jeremiah said: "I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. 'Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him.' But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure, they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion. O LORD of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart, let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause. Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!"

Reading II, Rom 5:12-15

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned—for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many.

Gospel, Mt 10:26-33

Jesus said to the Twelve: "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Happy Father's Day to all you Dads on earth, to Dads in Heaven, Grandads, Foster Dads, Step Dads and part-time Dads, and you who are father figures in people's lives. God Bless You!

I recently heard someone say: *"God doesn't protect us from anything! Rather, He sustains us through everything!"* ...it stopped me...my first reaction was NO, that doesn't sound right!... I'm constantly praying for His protection for all of my loved ones.

"God doesn't protect us from anything! Rather, He sustains us through everything!" After days of thinking and preparing for this homily, I now humbly agree. Let me explain.

Life is hard. We live in a world where money is the standard of success. It is a world of competition where there is one winner and the rest are failures. The world values possessions and beauty more than commitment. It loves shrewdness more than integrity. It is a fractured world where the environment, and people's race, culture and religion, are secondary to the whims of the powerful. And the corrupt aren't hesitant to justify violence and war to get their way. Unfortunately, the chaotic world is mostly deaf to the call to transformation and love...or if it does hear, too often it rebukes and ridicules the person who delivers the message. You know, I have to mention that last Friday, June 19, was Juneteenth, our national holiday that celebrated 161 years since the end of slavery...Our nation may have ended slavery, but we need to talk more to recognize how our racist history of Jim Crow and segregation right here in Roswell, GA has crippled the lives of our families, friends and neighbors. Life is harder for many of our sisters and brothers.

In the Gospel, Jesus warns that when we live as His loving followers, we will have to face the hostility of the world because our values and commitment are seen as threats. Jesus says, *"fear no one,"* yet we still experience Jeremiah's *"terror on every side."* In other words, *"God doesn't protect us from anything! Rather, He sustains us through everything!"*

So what's the answer? Life is hard and then we die? No, the answer is much better than that!

Today St. Paul tells us in the 2nd reading that without our faith that Jesus is Lord, the world in many ways is stacked against us. It can be filled with sin and death...temptations, hunger, abuse, suffering, evil. But then Paul said, *"the gift is not like the transgression."*

On this 12th Sunday in OT we need to recognize that since Easter, each Sunday, God has been revealing His plan for us to face the hostility of the world: During Easter season we learned Jesus suffered, died, was resurrected...and the Risen Christ is alive in our lives! On Pentecost Jesus sent the world an Advocate, the Holy Spirit to help us navigate our lives with His virtuous fruits of Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-control. On Trinity Sunday, we heard possibly the most radical revelation we will ever hear, that surely explains God's plan for us: God Himself is in community...a community of Persons that exists in perfect love...and that we are made in God's image and likeness...and that in Christ we are in God's community as well...forever. God in Three Persons, that is the inner nature of God, that is life in Heaven, and that is us being invited into loving relationships here on earth! On Corpus Christi Sunday, we learned Eucharist is not only a holy sacrament received at Mass. Eucharist is the real presence of Jesus transforming our lives into so much more...He is some-one, not some-thing...Jesus is our way of life that transforms us into the One Body of Christ prepared to thrive in a hostile world.

God created us to be in loving relationships. There we discover ourselves and we find the meaning of life. There we come to know who we are when we see ourselves through the eyes of those who relate to us, who come to know us and love us. It's where distant strangers become friends who care for each other. How many times this week did we encounter a friendly relationship? Even brief encounters can be meaningful and loving. One morning years ago, our doorbell rang. Two Jehovah Witness strangers-soon-to-be-friends came to share what reading the Bible is all about: God's Word speaking directly to us, convincing us that He is real and He loves us. We shared our common faith in God...we didn't argue about differences in theology. You see when we encounter a loving relationship, we begin to experience communion with God as His daughters and sons...being in the ultimate God-centered community of the Billions-who-are-One. (Imagine that! And we think Three-Persons-in-One is a mystery!) When we live in loving relationships, in communion with others, the world is transformed. Who we all are is expanded, broadened, and deepened...and that heals a fractured world!

The readings today and those since Easter Sunday remind us that God loves us so much that "*The gift is not like the transgression.*" He promised that no matter what, He will not leave us, He will always love us. In the midst of our sin, our fear and suffering, we can find strength

in this promise of God. We were not created to be thrown into the chaotic world to fend for ourselves. God created us to be in loving relationships. There we discover ourselves and we find the meaning of life. It's where distant strangers become friends who care for each other.

Why is it so hard to believe that God has a plan for us to face the hostility of the world? As today's Psalm pleaded, "*In your great kindness answer me with your constant help.*" He is always helping us, but on His terms. He grants us free will...can we give Him free will as well? Bad things happening to good people has an answer. But maybe we want God to make a different promise....to always protect us so we never suffer. Do we think God should prevent us from feeling pain rather than strengthening us when we are in pain? Which do we think shows us His true divine love and power? Jesus never said life would be easy...He said, "I will be with you always." ...Now we know why since the 6th century we Catholics have blessed each other several times during Mass with "*the Lord be with you*" from the Latin "*Dominus vobiscum*" ...And the response, "*Et cum spiritu tuo*" that translates "*And with your spirit.*"

St. Paul told us "*The gift is not like the transgression.*" God gives us His grace in the gift that far exceeds any gift we could imagine or hope for:

- Jesus is that gift far greater than any transgression brought on by sin.
- Jesus is the comfort to carry us through our loss and suffering.
- Jesus is the strength that enables us to endure any hardship or misunderstanding.
- Jesus is the light in the midst of darkness in the world.
- Jesus is our hope where there is suffering.

Like Jeremiah, St. Paul and St. Matthew, despite everything, we live and love in the world in God's community with our family, friends and strangers-soon-to-be-friends ...and with our Lord...Jesus Christ, who sustains us....

The Lord be with you...*And with your spirit!*

And, the Church says, AMEN!

Cycle A 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 IS 55:10-11

Thus says the LORD: Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; my word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Reading 2 ROM 8:18-23

Brothers and sisters: I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Gospel MT 13:1-23

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear."

The disciples approached him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken

away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted, and I heal them. "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

"Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

“so shall my Word that goes forth from my mouth, my Word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.” ... “Whoever has ears ought to hear”

The scriptures today are all about God’s bountiful love for all His creation. His word of the Kingdom is sown like seed, is broadcast far and wide for all to hear, for all to see, even on those whose hearts are like rocky or thorny thin soil. And, those of us who understand with our hearts, whose faith is growing strong, we have an awesome responsibility to sow God’s love so everyone may become like rich soil “achieving the end for which He sent it.”

The farmer in today’s Gospel parable should be our mentor. We work hard, and only sometimes succeed. Some of the best things that we give to others may not be well received. Maybe even most of what we want to sow in the lives of those around us doesn’t seem to “take”. It doesn’t seem to become rooted and permanently planted in their lives...at least in the way we wanted. All of us must deal with failure, especially in those areas where the best we have given to others comes up lacking, falling short of our hopes, and our great expectations.

There are some commentators who suggest that today’s Gospel parable was autobiographical. Jesus certainly had to face the pain of failure: His own hometown folks in Nazareth rejected Him. His own Jewish countrymen rejected His message. How about His handpicked twelve? One of them sold Him for thirty pieces of silver...Peter denied...Thomas doubted...the others fled when He was crucified.

Maybe this Gospel parable sounds too dismal and discouraging. The point today, however, is that we need to remember that Jesus did not let apparent failure stop Him. In His parable, Jesus went on to speak about crops that yielded a bountiful harvest, some yielding spectacular amounts. God loves us so much that today’s Gospel parable is not a sad story – it is a story of hope, not of despair.

You see, crisis is made up of both danger and opportunity. It’s true, evil surrounds us, but evil is slowly being overcome. God is at work among us bringing good to overcome evil. We must recognize that in the hands of God the slightest good can be multiplied to impact thousands. We only need to hand our efforts into His care. If God is not in our lives, then who is?

You and I, like all good farmers who continually face disasters of every sort, need to seriously engage ourselves in the enterprise of faith and hope, sowing the best of what we have, and then letting God's sun, wind, and gentle rains do the rest. God's only-begotten Son, along with His gentle Holy Spirit, provide waters of grace to nourish and sustain what we have sown in the lives of those we love. Believe this: The best years of our lives, and the best that we have given to others, or are giving right now, or will give in the future, will take root and not be fruitless.

No doubt as parents we have poured all of our love and faith into our children. We nurture their bodies, minds and souls the best we know how. We teach them to live our faith by how we live. And yet we have seen so many leave the Church and go elsewhere...or to no religion at all. Instead of being worried, however, we must never let them out of our reach...we must continue to relentlessly embrace them with our love and faith. The love and the faith that we have sown in the hearts of those around us, particularly in the hearts and souls of our children, will blossom. The hopes and dreams that we sow in others, even when they seem to be buried under too much dirt, will germinate, grow, and yield a harvest...even if our efforts do not now appear to be successful. Be must confident that God will make it so.

Sure, the world is a mess, but it always has been. We need to see that there is also an amazing amount of goodness and grace in the world. The greatest miracles are found everywhere in those around us...in those who, in spite of terrible odds, yield love and kindness, care and sensitivity, thirty, sixty or a hundred-fold! I have seen and even met many modern-day heroes among us right here in Atlanta who are doing miracles and leading us as never before in efforts to rid our world of hunger, homelessness, fear, racism, and injustice.

And so, my brothers and sisters, we need to keep sowing God's good seeds in the lives of those around us because as God Himself said today through His prophet Isaiah:

"so shall my Word that goes forth from my mouth, my Word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." ... "Whoever has ears ought to hear"

Cycle B 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 21, 2024

Gospel Starts at 18:38

Homily Starts at 19:41

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, JER 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the LORD. Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice."

Reading II, EPH 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters: In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Gospel, MK 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for

them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Today's readings are all about shepherds. We heard in the 1st reading about what God promises will happen when bad shepherds scatter their flocks. The 2nd reading told us about how our good shepherd Jesus brings peace across a divided mankind. God loves us so much that He includes all of humanity in His plan by calling everyone to a life of being holy shepherds...

leading others to Christ through the outpouring of God's love for everyone. No one is excluded.

This week's readings prompted me to think about a great shepherd of the Church, Pope John XXIII, who less than 3 months after being elected, shocked many when he created the Second Vatican Council, Vatican II, in 1959. The more I learn about him, the more I am in awe. To the world at large, Pope John in 4 short years gave what neither educators, nor political leaders, nor even the Church ever provided: a sense of unity across the human family. I remember Pope John XXIII as a young teenager even though I was far from the Catholic Church; I was a Protestant at the time, an EUB (an Evangelical United Brethren). *"Prior to Pope John, the Catholic church was seen almost as a fortress, very much concerned about its own internal stability and integrity, and engaging the world through missionary activity. Pope John wanted to reinforce that missionary mandate, but he also wanted to create an environment of dialogue, where the church would engage with all the forces of the modern world...Vatican II facilitated Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraged friendship with other non-Christian faiths, and opened the door for languages besides Latin to be used during Mass. Many other new positions such as in education, the media and divine revelation were also developed."*

In today's 2nd reading we see the sense that is the core of our Christian tradition: *"In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near."* God lives in history and invites all of us, the family of humanity, to help him with it. If His invitation goes begging in a world besieged by life-threatening danger and seduced by selfishness, we Christians must share the blame. But, Pope John XXIII believed that mankind will be saved where we are, not where we ought to be. Vatican II brought the Church, and in fact the whole Christian community, together for a new conversation with the world, and to treat the wounds that have torn apart the church for centuries. And now our shepherd Pope Francis continues that work helping the world to recapture the sense of unity of all through a vision of a synod church that involves everyone and is close to the world's wounds. Jesus died for everyone's sins, not just for a chosen few.

Vatican II also helped the Catholic Church rediscover the encounter with the Risen Christ every day in our lives...He is in us and we are in Him. This shattered nearly 1000 years of teaching and practice based on the notion that there were 2 classes of people in the Church, laypeople and the ordained. While the last 60 years has seen a decline in the priesthood and religious, lay contribution as shepherds in the Church has exploded with great numbers of us serving as religious educators, pastoral care givers, canon lawyers, parish administrators and most importantly, millions of us not only participating in ministries, but being the very body of Christ to people in need!

Today's Gospel shows us how hungry and desperate people are for a relationship with God and shows how we should respond when we encounter these people. Jesus welcomed back the Twelve Apostles. He had sent them out two by two to be shepherds preaching repentance, driving out demons, and curing the sick. And Jesus, like any of us would, wants to have a reunion with them, a special gathering, just himself and his closest companions. He says to them, "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.*" Jesus is looking forward to a pleasant evening of eating and laughing and storytelling with his friends.

However, that's not what happens, is it? They get in a boat and ride off to find a quiet beach, just for a few hours, just for a simple meal. But their plans are spoiled. A huge crowd had replaced a small get-together. And the crowd is not there to cheer Jesus. No, they were people with problems, people with sin and sickness, loneliness and grief, and they had come to Christ, in search of a shepherd, in need of a teacher.

How does the Lord respond? Jesus doesn't think about his own needs; He expresses no regret; He doesn't turn to his Apostles and roll his eyes. Instead, the Gospel tells us: "*When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*" Without pause, He began to work for the salvation of the crowd, these sheep without a shepherd, these students without a teacher. It wasn't what he planned to do. But he did it anyway.

Who among us here will drive out demons or cure the sick in the name of Jesus? Probably no one. Who of us will die for the sake of Christ's name? Again, probably no one. But, who of us will meet the unexpected person with a problem or an unplanned guest? We all will! In fact, we can count on it!

Today Christ says to us quite simply: *"When you meet a person in need, that is your moment to respond to Me, Jesus. Not performing miracles, not suffering death for Me, but responding to that man or woman who needs help and support...that someone who needs a shepherd...even if they are going to ruin your plans."* That is our moment to respond to our shepherd by becoming shepherds ourselves. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can become shepherds...As St. Augustine so forcefully said, *"So be a member of the Body of Christ...Be what you can see [in the Eucharistic] and receive what you are."* In other words, be the Body of Christ for those people to encounter. It may seem like such a small thing, sometimes a minor aggravation even, definitely not the stuff of saints. But the Lord is clear: He will meet us where we are, and that is where He wants us to respond as His body.

- We all have families, we meet Christ in them, and there we are the Body of Christ for them.
- Wherever we are, if someone upsets us, there we meet Christ and there we are the Body of Christ for them.
- And when we meet someone in need, there we meet Christ, and there we are the Body of Christ for them.

You know Jesus only told us once at the Last Supper that He would be present in the Bread and Wine, but He tells us repeatedly in all the Gospels that He is always present in the poor and afflicted. It is Christ who has sought us out in those unexpected people that we meet. It is Christ Himself who appears to us in the needy.

Cycle C 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, GN 18:1-10a

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot. Looking up, Abraham saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: "Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. Now that you have come this close to your servant, let me bring you a little food that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way." The men replied, "Very well, do as you have said." Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah, "Quick, three measures of fine flour! Knead it and make rolls." He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice steer, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then Abraham got some curds and milk, as well as the steer that had been prepared, and set these before the three men; and he waited on them under the tree while they ate. They asked Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?" He replied, "There in the tent." One of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son."

Reading 2, COL 1:24-28

Brothers and sisters: Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past. But now it has been manifested to his holy ones, to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you, the hope for glory. It is he whom we proclaim,

admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Gospel, LK 10:38-42

Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving,

came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

The Scriptures today tell us about being open to the unexpected ways that God comes into our lives so that we can receive His blessings. The 1st reading tells us about the heavenly beings disguised as strangers who became honored guests when Abraham and Sarah offered passionate openness and hospitality. They were rewarded in their old age with the promise of an heir. In the Gospel, however, Martha also offered considerable hospitality to the Lord Jesus, but she seems to be dressed down for doing too much and worrying about all she needed to do in order to make Jesus comfortable. There have been many interpretations of this story of Mary and Martha, but it is obviously a story about contrasts between service and spirituality. Some have said that spiritual life is superior to the active or practical life. Martin Luther used this verse to prove that there was justification by faith rather than by works. So what was Jesus really trying to tell us?

We know that Jesus would typically move from village to village counting on the hospitality of someone to house him and feed him. If no one did, then Jesus would move on. Martha welcomed Jesus as an honored guest and set about to prepare for his visit. It is not that she didn't want to also be a disciple, after all she did call him Lord. But Martha addressed practical things to serve Jesus before getting to the spiritual ones.

Mary however immediately positioned herself at the feet of Jesus to listen. In fact, in their culture the phrase "to sit at someone's feet" usually meant that they were being taught. But, women, in that day, were not to be taught...they were excluded from studying the Hebrew Torah. No doubt Martha must have been angry when she was left with all the work to do while her sister Mary was listening to Jesus. A woman's place was not sitting around listening. They were responsible for preparing everything for the guests. So, why was it that Jesus didn't just say: "Mary, why don't you go help your sister? She is feeling pressured to get our dinner ready." Like so many times in the New Testament, we hear that instead Jesus goes against established traditions of the day.

Jesus understood the typical role of the woman in ancient society was to serve others, but he wanted women to achieve more balance in their lives. Instead of always doing some activity, they needed to take time to pause and reflect on God. It seemed the opposite was true of men in that culture. The men often studied and prayed and held discussions about God. So, Jesus frequently said to the men that they must "do" the will of God. Jesus wanted everyone, women and men, to have a balance of service and spirituality in their lives. In fact, Jesus was suggesting that

we too need this balance in our lives. We are dedicated to our jobs and families, yet we know that we need to take time to practice our faith, to pray and serve others. It is always a challenge.

6 years ago, we lost my wife's mother, Gerry Rock, who we lovingly called GG. She had been living in Georgia for 18 months, and I saw how every morning the first thing she did were her prayers...especially those for her family. She definitely was a self-sacrificing mom who was dedicated to raising 6 kids. Can you imagine having 5 kids under the age of 5?! GG and Bob, my wife's father, definitely were dedicated Chicago Southside Irish Catholic parents! GG ended up with 16 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren (now up to 26 or 27, it's hard to keep track)! Her morning prayers took some time. GG and Jesus had, and I can say still have, a great relationship. I believe everyone who met GG ended up loving her. GG always had a smile to share and a thank you to give to everyone she met. People loved her like no one I have ever known. And, if that was how strangers felt about her, imagine how she impacted her family! Let me share with you what GG's grandson Pete said happened with her around 26 years ago: "...your grandparents are sorta the least human of all humans. Like I said, they mostly exist. for your whole life. but then one day they laugh to tears, and you're shook. you can't unsee it. and what you really can't unsee is all their pain. and fear. and loss. and, of course, their joy. and comfort. and security. and puzzlement. and their intelligence. and loss of such. and their wisdom. and loss of such. ... it all comes at once...my grandma was human, i learned. and i was inspired to be good. and happy. and to have a purpose. and a way big perspective. on everything. ...my grandma changed my life. in that moment. that's one of her likely many stories. it's now the main one i know about her. i just wish she knew it about herself. before she left...I am glad she met my wife." Pete knows that GG's legacy of love and life, of service and spirituality, is not over...it lives on in us, her family, and everyone who knew her!

Jesus loves us so much that He is saying to each one of us: "I know you are busy, and you are doing wonderful things, but take some time for yourself and me. I want to talk to you. Please, take some time to listen to me and learn from me."

Only then, after Jesus has refreshed us, is it that we will come to understand it is not just doing good works that are most important. It is about following Jesus being truly attentive to the needs of others, to the common good, that helps bring about the kingdom of God on earth.

Taking time to be open to God's love in our lives... especially when we are hyper-active....it brings a peaceful balance and purpose to our lives.

You see, that's how Jesus changes our lives, and changes those around us. We who know people like GG truly are blessed by God...they are proof of what can happen when Christ is alive in our lives!

Cycle A 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 19, 2023

Gospel starts at 15:15

Homily starts at 16:58

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, IS 56:1, 6-7

Thus says the LORD: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice, about to be revealed. The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD, and becoming his servants— all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant, them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Reading II, ROM 11:13-15, 29-32

Brothers and sisters: I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I glory in my ministry in order to make my race jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you once disobeyed God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now disobeyed in order that, by virtue of the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Gospel, MT 15:21-28

At that time, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. Jesus' disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did Jesus homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." When Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour.

“...for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

The readings today raise the question about insiders and outsiders, particularly in our Christian communities. They make clear that with Christ there are no outsiders. It is one thing to define membership in a group. It is another thing entirely when the definition defines acceptability that may harm or exclude “the foreigners”, “the other” in our lives. We must ask ourselves, are we inclusive or exclusive? Isaiah spoke of a time when outsiders would join insiders in worshipping God...The Lord said His *“house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”* In the Gospel, Jesus broke out of His Jewish cultural and religious identity that limited Him. He finally blessed the persistent and faith-filled Canaanite woman whose very gender, whose history of being a prime enemy of Israel, and whose pagan religion made her a very unsuitable outsider. Who among us would have persistently pleaded with Jesus as she did? But Christ responded to her faith and made her an insider. He directs us to take the same action, to be inclusive, not exclusive. Our cultural and religious biases must never stand in the way of God’s grace. When Pope Francis prayed with Christians, Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem in 2014, calling them *“dear brothers”*, he showed us that in the unity of mankind there are no outsiders...God loves us all, no matter how diverse we are...His invitation of mercy and salvation is for everyone.

I believe, we here at St. Andrew are assuring everyone is an insider as Jesus has challenged us to do. We are working hard to welcome people and remove barriers that marginalize others because of our cultural or Catholic biases. In fact, I think all our ministries demonstrate that we don’t want anyone to miss an opportunity to experience God’s mercy and grace. We don’t ask, “Are you Catholic? We ask, “How can we help?”

Let me give you an example of how to make a difference serving God by promoting dignity and participation of people who many think of as outsiders. Over the past 10 years I have been involved with Family Promise, a faith-based organization of 20 congregations and dozens of volunteers serving homeless families in Forsyth County. If you can imagine, today over 800 students in Forsyth County schools are identified as homeless, with most living in unstable multi-family environments. I came to know fellow ministers from dozens of faith-based congregations... including a Jewish Synagogue, the Latter-Day Saints, two Mosques, two Hindu Temples and many Christian denominations of every persuasion. The Imam of one of the Mosques, which has 250 families with over 500 children, was very welcoming during our visit and served a wonderful lunch.... we discussed their

interest in helping the homeless, and we also shared our faith in the one true God of Abraham. I had to smile when he told me that his name Isa means Jesus in Arabic, and that he named his first daughter Mary...after the revered virgin mother of Jesus in Islam...Mary, who the Quran mentions over 70 times, and whose 19th chapter is named after...and which says Mary was the greatest women who ever lived. I smiled because we knew that everything Mary does is to guide us to her son. Maybe one day it will be their devotion to the Virgin Mary that will lead Muslims to Jesus, who they recognize as the great “Anointed One” and “Promised Messiah”, but will then come to truly know that He is the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God. By far, most of the ministers I met know how important outreach ministry is for their congregations to thrive and grow in faith. One Pastor said, “it may be counterintuitive, but you have to give away the love of God to fully receive His love.” Unfortunately, I also met a couple of ministers who aren’t ready to be inclusive. They don’t mind serving “the other” of different faiths as clients on their terms, but they are not yet ready to serve side-by-side as volunteers with them.

So, what should we be most concerned about? We need to make sure we are breaking down the barriers that keep people outside, not building barriers around our ministries, or in fact, our church. If we isolate ourselves, we can’t fully serve God. We need to be welcoming and continuously make improvements to convince more people that we are all insiders. As Pope Francis said at World Youth Day 2 weeks ago, *“there is space [in our Church] for everyone, and when there isn’t, please, let’s work so that there is... for [whoever] makes mistakes, for who falls, for who it is difficult.”* Departing from his prepared speech, he asked all the young people *“repeat with me: ‘Everyone, everyone, everyone!’”* before waves of *“todos, todos, todos”* spread throughout the crowd. He said, *“That is the church, the mother of all...there is room for all.”*

Cycle C 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, JER 38:4-6, 8-10

In those days, the princes said to the king: "Jeremiah ought to be put to death; he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in this city, and all the people, by speaking such things to them; he is not interested in the welfare of our people, but in their ruin." King Zedekiah answered: "He is in your power"; for the king could do nothing with them. And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech, a court official, went there from the palace and said to him: "My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern. He will die of famine on the spot, for there is no more food in the city." Then the king ordered Ebed-melech the Cushite to take three men along with him, and draw the prophet Jeremiah out of the cistern before he should die.

Reading II, HEB 12:1-4

Brothers and sisters: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Gospel, Lk 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing! There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

In today's Scriptures we heard some disturbing passages... not exactly what we would call Good News. We heard about Jeremiah being thrown into a cistern left to die... Then St. Paul telling us about struggling "against sin, but not yet resisting to the point of shedding blood"... then in the Gospel a not very peaceful Jesus setting the earth on fire and ranting about the division He will cause even among family members. Where is the loving and merciful God in these readings?

I want to tell you a little secret. When I was in formation to become a Deacon, about a hundred years ago, my homiletics teacher responded to a question about what the theme was of that day's readings. He said, *"That's simple. There is only one theme in the Scriptures every day. It is that God loves us."* That's why if you ever heard one of my homilies, you know that I always try to explain what I heard in the reading that shows that God loves us. I have said it in all of the homilies I preached in the last 23 years so I wouldn't forget... that we wouldn't forget... that God loves us first and foremost above all else. So, with confidence and the prayer from today's Responsorial Psalm, *"Lord, come to my aid,"* I began searching in today's readings for the loving and merciful God....and, I found Him.

Today's readings continue the focus on discipleship started last week, particularly the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. God loves us so much that when He calls us to be His disciple, He tells it like it is. Our commitment to the values and principles of our faith won't be appreciated by everyone, and in fact could lead to ridicule or worse. Maybe even members of our own families won't agree with us. But God doesn't just leave us there. He knows we can't do it on our own. So He stoops down and draws us out of the pit that we find ourselves in, like He did for Jeremiah in the 1st reading. He puts us in communities of loving people throughout our lives like the 2nd reading said that "we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses." These people are witnesses to perseverance in life's struggles and they show us the value of being committed to our faith. These are people who know how to live their lives in heroic ways... though most of the time it's in seemingly insignificant ways that nevertheless can have a lasting impact. These are the people God wants us to be. And this is how He accomplishes extraordinary things.

As I was pondering the readings, I thought about our recent pilgrimage to Portugal, Spain and France where 16 of us became a community of witnesses who journeyed together. All in all, our pilgrimage was what Pat and I expected: an arduous and blessed journey, while at the same

time being more than we imagined...if that makes sense. Someone asked me, "in your conversations on the pilgrimage, what was said that stuck with you?" I thought about that question for days.

- I brought a book with me that I read occasionally, Richard Rohr's *Tears of Things*. He says it's his last book...he's getting old...I can relate. In this book Richard is speaking to us about the Prophets...to understand them you have to read them completely to see their evolution from violence and fear so common in their cultures, to lamentations and sadness, and finally to God's infinite love...we too often only see the violence and fear. Richard said, "every priest needs a prophet"...for me it became "everyone needs a prophet." But be careful what you wish for...Prophets don't tell us what we want to hear. I had some brief but profound discussions about Richard Rohr and his books that stuck with me.

- We were a small but diverse group including folks from St. Andrew and other Atlanta parishes, and some from Nashville and Detroit and Spain, who brought us new perspectives. The key I think was we were comfortable enough to shuffle around at meals and other grouping times to get to know everyone pretty well.... I had many brief but profound discussions about life's struggles and the value of being committed to our faith that stuck with me.

- In preparation to preach on the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, my prayer-conversations with Jesus stuck with me. Here's what I heard: "if we want to follow Jesus, we need to start with the Eucharist! In Mass we need to celebrate the radical transformation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ Himself... but we must also celebrate the radical transformation of ourselves into the Body of Christ, the Church! Eucharist is a choice to do something... to take action...to fully, consciously, and actively participate in offering ourselves to follow Christ...with His love...every, single, day...with everyone. To celebrate Eucharist is an amazing and radical life changing activity because the truth is, God will transform us in ways beyond our imaginations!

- These conversations were the gifts of the pilgrimage that I would not have recognized if I hadn't heard that question...it stuck with me. That's what makes a pilgrimage!

So, you see our loving and merciful God was in today's readings...He prompted Ebed-melech to get Jeremiah out of the cistern...He convinced St. Paul to tell us that we faith-filled Christians are not alone, "a cloud of witnesses" will be with us as we "keep our eyes fixed on Jesus."

Finally, when we choose to be a disciple of Christ, when we choose to follow Jesus, He will challenge us to the very core of our being. We can count on it! But also know, God loves us and He has a plan for who He wants us to be. You see, this is how He accomplishes extraordinary things...in spite of the violence and fear, the hatred and the evil, in the world around us!

God loves us!

Cycle C 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 SIR 3:17-18, 20, 28-29

My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God. What is too sublime for you, seek not, into things beyond your strength search not. The mind of a sage appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the joy of the wise. Water quenches a flaming fire, and alms atone for sins.

Reading 2 HEB 12:18-19, 22-24A

Brothers and sisters: You have not approached that which could be touched and a blazing fire and gloomy darkness and storm and a trumpet blast and a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that no message be further addressed to them. No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.

Gospel LK 14:1, 7-14

On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to a higher position.' Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Then he said to the host who invited him, "When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;

blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

The Scriptures today tell us that God loves us so much that He knows balancing our pride with humility is a problem for us all. The theme of humility is central today. The first reading from Sirach showed how crucial humility is in our relationship with God and others. Sirach was written approximately 180 years before Christ, to keep Jewish traditions alive during a time of Greek cultural influence. This passage shows us that true humility is about knowing our place before God. Sirach's wisdom is still relevant today because humility is essential to our spiritual growth. It's about our relationship with God and others as we value everyone's dignity and strive for a more just society improving the common good.

In the Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus teaches us about true humility and radical hospitality when He tells His hosts to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." He shows the value of being inclusive and charitable. Dining in ancient Middle Eastern culture was more than just eating...It was about honor, status, and giving back. The seating, the guests, and the food all showed one's social level. Jesus knew this and taught a lesson on radical hospitality. In the ancient world, status and honor were key. Jesus flips this by saying the last will be first. He calls us to rethink our values and priorities. In His parable about inviting guests the message is clear: the kingdom of God welcomes everyone, especially those who can't repay kindness. This is not just charity. It's about seeing the dignity of every person. Traditional values say honor is received from others based on our status, and hospitality is about exchange. But Jesus teaches us that true honor is shown by humbling ourselves and serving others, and radical hospitality is about serving those who cannot repay.

As I mentioned two weeks ago in my homily, I have been thinking a lot about our recent pilgrimage to Portugal, Spain and France where 16 of us became a community of witnesses who journeyed together. Two major stops on our pilgrimage were the Marian shrines of Fatima, Portugal and Lourdes, France. Both obviously were profoundly devoted to Mary. To be honest, experiencing this intense devotion was overwhelming to me...I know that everything the Blessed Mother does points us to her son Jesus, but at times I found myself missing Jesus. Then I came to realize that what we loved about each place was so different, as each shrine is so different. Fatima felt much more remote. The apparitions of Lucia and her cousins Francisco and Jacinta in 1917 were in very remote places miles from the small hamlet where they lived. The modern town of Fatima was built up around it. Lourdes was different. Bernadette's apparitions occurred just outside of an ancient

village, which is still a bustling village with narrow streets. Fatima is massive; Lourdes is even bigger...and yet both have an intimacy that is hard to explain.

What we loved about Fatima was the remote Stations of the Cross that brought us close to Jesus. While it was still somewhat cool, we walked the Stations using “Mary’s Way of the Cross” readings and we sang between stations. The outdoor Stations of the Cross wind through the olive and cork trees of the Fatima countryside once frequented by the three shepherd children and their flocks. Easily overlooked were the small plaques printed in the Hungarian language at the base of each Station. Inscribed are the names of the “Hungarians of the free world” who erected these impressive monuments and cobblestone walkways as a prayer of thanksgiving for the fall of atheistic Communism in Hungary in 1956.

What we loved about Lourdes was the hospital and the loving care for the sick and disabled who were much more prevalent at Lourdes than Fatima. The Accueil Notre Dame (in English, Our Lady of Welcome) 900 bed hospital is in the heart of Lourdes. The building is designed in the form of “open arms”, Our Lady of Welcome hospital reminds us that, in Lourdes, everyone is welcomed as a person. The mission of the hospital staff and volunteers is to be sure that the fragile pilgrims will not be disappointed. They are part of the immense chain of solidarity to make sure that everyone, but especially the most vulnerable, can be properly hosted in Lourdes. Being there was all I needed to realize God’s love is profoundly present in the world!

In today’s readings we penetrated the idea of humility. In a world that loves to brag about itself, humility is sometimes rare but always most important value. The book of Sirach told us true greatness comes from being humble, not from trying to be the center of attention. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told us to be humble, especially when we’re with others. He is talking about the way we live our lives. He’s talking about the way we treat ourselves, others, and God. He’s talking about how we do not let our pride prevent us from following Jesus every day with His fierce love!

Cycle B 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Is 50:5-9a

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back. I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting. The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame. He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me, let us appear together. Who disputes my right? Let that man confront me. See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong?

Reading 2 Jas 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, " but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

Gospel Mk 8:27-35

Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Christ." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

"Who do you say I am?"

All of us have some idea about who Jesus is. Do you remember his "I am" statements? *"I am the Bread of Life."* *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* And perhaps most dramatic, *"Before Abraham came to be, I am!"* These statements declare who Jesus is, that he is much more than an ordinary human being. But the question Jesus asks today is very personal: *"Who do you say that I am?"* When we approach Jesus in prayer, at Communion or at Reconciliation, who do you, Jesus asks, who do you say that I am?

Simon Peter responded, *"You are the Christ."* Jesus accepts that answer. It's not complete, but it is accurate. Jesus accepts Peter's response because it leads to his mission, the reason he came. He is the Christ, in Greek, "the anointed one", or in Hebrew, "Messiah." He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit for a purpose. Jesus' purpose might surprise you. It certainly surprised Peter and the other apostles. They thought of the Messiah as a triumphant figure, someone who would vindicate them in their struggle against Roman dominance. But Jesus does not see his role that way. Yes, he is the Christ, but his mission was this: "to suffer greatly...be rejected...and killed"

When Peter hears this, he tries to dissuade Jesus. But Jesus rebukes Peter and calls him, *"Satan."* Strong words. The first reading tells about a man who says *"I set my face like flint."* That man is Jesus; he set his face toward Jerusalem even though it meant horrendous suffering. Suffering, rejection and death - not an appealing mission. It does, however, contain a note of hope - to *"rise after three days."* God loves us so much that Jesus offers that mission - with its promise - not only to the disciples, but also to you and me. *"Follow me,"* he says. *"Take up your cross and follow me."*

For many churches a main challenge is that there are many more families registered than families who actively participate in ministries, Faith Formation or donate regularly. Many have a diverse population ranging from families with a few to many children, single-parent families, single adults of all ages, seniors, people speaking many languages can be recognized. No doubt people have crosses to bear. And in spite of thinking we don't have the time, many of us somehow make the time to participate. But what I must point out, when some of the less-participating families do appear...and we recognize them often... these people are being transformed right here after some amazing and powerful encounters with Jesus. They then become more active stewards of the Catholic Faith and contributing as parishioners.

I believe it is our St. Andrew spiritual community and the outreach of our ministries sharing in the lives of so many people around us that makes us visible in our community. As today's second reading tells us, *"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?"* This compassionate attitude we have toward the world around us has been very much a part of our tradition, and it reflects the way the Catholic Church has related to the world since Vatican II. During Vatican II, controversy surrounded the development of the document *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church in the World, because it focused on what our Catholic Church's mission was to the world, particularly to developing countries. Getting consensus from the Cardinals was tough. Archbishop Camara of Brazil was reported to say in exasperation, "Are we to spend our whole time discussing internal church problems while 2/3s of the world is dying of hunger?" Vatican II also recognized that while the Church offers the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world, the Church has much to learn from and share with the world's diversity of education, vast cultures and broad life experience. But possibly most importantly, *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes the important role of the Catholic laity being a "leaven" in the world...we are the ones who get our hands dirty...we help transform the world from within for the improvement of the human condition and the work for justice. We are *empowered by the Holy Spirit, and we are called to reach out with charity and justice to serve all in need, to foster unity in diversity, and to be responsible stewards of God's many gifts.*"

We have so many ministries that touch people so profoundly that their hearts have been converted, their faith is deepened and their lives are transformed...this is true for both the ones who have received the help and assistance, and the ministers themselves. For you and me the Christian life, as Jesus makes clear, is not a matter of dreaming about great deeds. It is about taking up one's cross and following Jesus today, being the Body of Christ bringing His love to the world. Please, won't you come join us on the journey to tell Jesus who we say He is?

Cycle B 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Wis 2:12, 17-20

The wicked say: Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him.

Reading II, Jas 3:16—4:3

Beloved: Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace. Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Gospel, Mk 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise. But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." Taking a child, he placed it in the their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

Someone once said, *"Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by Love."*

Today we need to recognize the Atlanta Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women who are having their annual convention here at St. Andrew. Welcome and God Bless all you women of our Archdiocese, who with all your gifts, talent, and love, bless us every day.

This gathering reminded me of one morning several years ago at the Friday morning men's group I attend. We were asked to identify the most holy person in our lives...they had to be a person we actually knew, not someone we admired, like the Pope. To a man, we all mentioned women in our lives as the most holy....and how they taught us where their holiness came from. The Scripture readings this week tell us that God loves us so much that as we struggle with life, he blesses us with gifts of wisdom from above...like the holy women in our lives give us. The more we respond in faith, gentleness, and love; the more we understand that God's wisdom and mercy come by cultivating peace.

When I was in 6th grade, I was a ringleader among the kids in my neighborhood. I had quite a mouth on me showboating my bravado, but I was careful to keep it from my parents and sisters. One day my mother called me in and asked me to sit down. I wondered what was up. She said she had heard reports about my behavior. Then, of all the things she could have said to me, my mother said, "Roger, you disappoint me." It cut like a knife. It stabbed me in the heart...I was devastated! A spanking or grounding would have been much easier to deal with. She chose the words that stopped me dead in my tracks, and I changed from that day forward. No more swearing...no more disappointing my mother...she never told my father...and she never had to say that to me again.

So, who have been these most holy, most important people in our lives? Probably they were not rich and famous. Most likely they gave us what we could not give ourselves. Probably they taught us important lessons, gave us important ideas and values. Without a doubt, they unselfishly gave us their love. They gave us their time, their energy and their concern. They probably sacrificed their own comfort and convenience to give us things they simply wanted to give us. Most likely they corrected us when we went astray; they gave us moral norms, guidelines to develop a quality character; and they challenged us to be a better person. They taught us how to love God. They mentored us by their example of Christian living. They nurtured us in the life of our Church and her Sacraments. In other words, they were following Jesus by placing before us on life's banquet table the necessary nourishment for our souls.

Our lives are different when we recognize Jesus is here with us. Our priorities change. What we do and making it matter, changes. God has given us priceless blessings: our very lives, unconditional love, the Eucharist and other Sacraments, free will, eternal life in His kingdom, and as the 2nd reading said He brings us peace, gentleness and mercy.

In this parish we are not about buildings and budgets and bigness. St. Andrew Catholic Church is about Jesus Christ. And, with Jesus leading our community we realize that people who worship here are transformed. You know, I think we do a good job at worshiping...we know how to praise and glorify God and pray to Him. But you know, Jesus never said "worship me." He said, "follow me." So, like the disciples, though it may take some time for us as it did for them, we learn a very hard lesson from Jesus: He needed to suffer the intense injustice and savage pain and humiliation of human life...He needed to be broken as we sometimes are broken by life. And, like the disciples, we come to know it's not about putting the greatest or holiest person among us on a pedestal...though surely it can't be so bad to recognize those who guide us to journey together following Jesus. But we don't serve each other because we are trained to serve or to receive recognition, we don't serve because we are expected to, we serve each other because we know that we too are broken, and can't get through life alone! So you see, it's about Jesus Christ, alive, here and now...it's about Him, it's not about us. Once we decide to follow Jesus, we realize we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. When we deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and share what He has trusted us with, the world changes! We are stewards, not owners. We are servants sharing God's blessings. There is no us versus them...there's only we! So together we dig deep and we get involved in our families and our vocations and our ministries journeying together loving and serving each other.

I would like to share a parable that may help us better understand: A holy man was having a conversation with God and said, "Lord, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like." God led the holy man to two doors. He opened one of the doors and the holy man looked in. In the middle of the room was a large round table. On the table was a large pot of stew which smelled delicious and made the holy man's mouth water. But the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They had spoons with very long handles strapped to their arms. Each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths. The holy man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. The Lord said,

"This is Hell." They went to the next room and opened the door. The room looked exactly the same as the first one! There was a large round table with a large pot of stew that made the holy man's mouth water again. The people were equipped with the same long-handled spoons, but here the people were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking. The holy man said, "I don't understand." "It is simple" God said, "You see, they have learned to feed each other, to care for each other, with what I gave them."

Someone once said, *"Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by Love."*

I thank the Lord there are people out there like you! God bless you!

Cycle C 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 21, 2025

Gospel Starts at 16:27

Homily Starts at 19:37

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! "When will the new moon be over," you ask, "that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat? We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!" The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Reading II, 1 Tm 2:1-8

Beloved: First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time. For this I was appointed preacher and apostle --I am speaking the truth, I am not lying--, teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

Gospel, Lk 16:1-13 or 16:10-13

Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward who was reported to him for squandering his property. He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.' The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.' He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?' He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him,

'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' Then to another the steward said, *'And you, how much do you owe?'* He replied, *'One hundred kors of wheat.'* The steward said to him, *'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.'* And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. *"For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon."*

“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!... Never will I forget a thing [you] have done!”

We hear this ominous promise on this 25th Sunday from the book of Amos. He was a prophet around 750 BC from the Southern Kingdom of Judah who was called by God to preach to the Israelites living in the Northern Kingdom. Amos is often called the prophet of social justice because he addressed what it means to live a covenant relationship with God. He challenged the people of Israel (and us!) to reflect on our responsibilities towards the marginalized and oppressed. Amos rejected all forms of injustice and called for communities where equity and fairness are upheld for the benefit of the common good.

Today the prophet Amos proclaims that true religion involves not only worshipping God on the Sabbath but also caring for the poor during the rest of the week. Amos rails against the rich who make a mockery of the Sabbath exploiting the poor and powerless. Even in 750BC they had a top and bottom problem. Despite all their cheating, those merchants, those hypocrites, continued to worship on the Sabbath. Amos condemns such false religion in the strongest way.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is not praising the dishonesty of the steward but is rather praising his decisive action in a time of crisis. Jesus is speaking to his disciples (and us!) to be good stewards of all God has placed in our care. He says to us: You can learn from the dishonest child of the world. In a time of crisis, do something! You can't just sit back or try to run away. Act! But when you do, act in a way that makes you trustworthy.

The second part of today's Gospel has several sayings to tell us about doing good in the world, like 'be trustworthy in small matters.' Jesus is telling his disciples and us: If children of the world are smart enough to use money to secure an earthly future, we should be smart enough to use our resources to ensure our heavenly future.

So how we can be more clever at promoting the Kingdom of God in a world in crisis with top and bottom problems, and division? The powerful few at the top and the masses of humanity suffering at the bottom are overwhelming! Well, thank God we have help from the top to the bottom! We have a loving God, and the Scriptures, and many of our Catholic leaders, and importantly, we have each other. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources, the leadership, and the opportunities to respond to the world around us. We have Pope Leo

XIV, who last week in his first formal interview addressed some of the big social issues of our time: income inequality, polarization and the need for peace. Leo said, "We live in times when polarization seems to be one of the words of the day, but it's not helping anybody. Or if it's helping anyone, it's very few, [while] everyone else is suffering."

Today we who are the St. Andrew community must respond to the small and sometimes big matters of the world surrounding us as God's children of light...as beacons of hope. We must realize that fostering social justice is like making generous charity donations. There are never quick fixes. We must be dedicated for the long haul and not let ourselves be spread too thin trying to fix too many things at once. Each of us should focus on a few, maybe the one or two issues that really touch our hearts and then join others to make decisions as trustworthy disciples living in the Kingdom of God...as resourceful as the steward in the Gospel, but always concerned with the welfare of others, and not just our own. Let me share an example.

Years ago, Archbishop Wilton Gregory challenged us Deacons in the Archdiocese to become more involved with ministries outside our parish. As I was contemplating what this meant for me, a friend told me about an organization called Family Promise of Forsyth County that was recruiting local churches to help homeless families in the county become self-sufficient. If you can imagine, for years over 700 students in Forsyth County schools have been identified as homeless... most are living in unstable multi-family environments. Through Family Promise I came to know dozens of fellow disciples from diverse faith-based congregations... including 2 Roman and an Orthodox Catholic church, numerous Christian denominations of every persuasion, a Jewish Synagogue, the Latter-Day Saints, 2 Mosques, and 2 Hindu Temples.

But you know, Family Promise impacts much more than homeless families each year. By far, most of the Pastors I met knew how important outreach ministry is for their congregations to thrive and grow in faith. One Pastor said, "it may be counterintuitive, but you have to give away the love of God to fully receive His love." We learned that when our faith-based congregations worked together amazing things happen ...even insurmountable social justice happens. In recent years a group of church leaders, who knew each other from Family Promise and from The Forsyth County Ministerial Association, began the Forsyth Descendants Scholarships in response to the ugly racist legacy the county had. It boiled over in 1912 when all of the Blacks living in Forsyth County were forcibly expelled! ...they numbered over 1,000!

Citizens who lost everything! Blatant and brutal racism lasted into the 1980's. Quote, "[These scholarships] are an act of love—doing for a few what we wish we could do for all. This is not meant to be a repayment, a reckoning, or reparations. We encourage our community to learn about the events of 1912 and participate in supporting the scholarships." Unquote. You know, if racism and hatred are losing in a place like Forsyth County because of us, then I have hope!

The readings today are all about social justice. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources, many leaders, and the opportunities to respond to the world around us....in fact, to change the world! You know, I think I am starting to grasp how our St. Andrew ministries can address the needy both with charity as well as impacting the deeper social justice issues of our society. It's complicated, but it's simple! We have each other...this why it is so important for all of us to participate...as well as give generously. We must listen and learn from the rich social justice heritage of our Catholic Church and Pope Leo XIV, ranging from human dignity and human rights, to caring for God's creation and solidarity among our human family. He took the name Leo because he was inspired by Pope Leo XIII, who addressed the big social stresses put on society by the Industrial Revolution with his monumental encyclical Rerum Novarum. Believe me, we will be hearing a lot about social justice while Leo is our Pope!

You see, it is only then that we will be better prepared as trustworthy disciples to personally support the welfare of others and not just focus on our own. We each must praise God with our lives...lifting the poor and the suffering every day... not only on the Sabbath,,,

"Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!... Never will I forget a thing [you] have done!"

Cycle A 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Is 25:6-10a

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken. On that day it will be said: "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

Reading II, Phil 4:12-14, 19-20

Brothers and sisters: I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress. My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel, Mt 22:1-14

Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come. A second time he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast."' Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.' The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests." But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. The king said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.' Many are invited, but few are chosen."

To be honest, it took me a while to grasp and embrace today's readings. At first, the Gospel parable seemed to say the Kingdom of Heaven was in the future and wasn't for everyone, but I know that God loves us all unconditionally...right now...just the way we are. His love and mercy are for all mankind, not a just chosen few sometime in the future...He'll never give up on us and eventually even the most stubborn will give in to His relentless love! But it's hard to understand when we are overwhelmed, assaulted by all the problems consuming our world...it is challenging for us to see that the answer is here...right before us.

So, I want to try something different today. I ask you to take a comfortable prayer position... maybe bowing your head or closing your eyes while we reflect on today's readings. My homily today is a prayer for all humanity because we are all brothers and sisters as the children of God. So, for our families, for our communities, for our country and for all people around the world, ✠Let us pray in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face..."

Lord Jesus, we do love you and we praise you. We come to you today seeking answers and in fact we pray for miracles. The world is in a year of record-breaking rising temperatures, wildfires and flooding... in a year of war atrocities in Ukraine, but also in over 30 other areas of the world like Haiti, and now Israel and Gaza...in a year of innocents being displaced by terrorism and war, forced to leave their homes and countries...by failed immigration policies dumping people into cities which are running out of resources.... We are in a year of discord within in our government and our church. When will it end? What's next to go wrong? How can we commit much of anything beyond caring for our families? Dear Jesus what should we do?

"In every circumstance and in all things, I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

Lord, you know we are committed to God's work, but where do we start? We are trying to listen to our trusted family, friends, leaders...and you. Help us to step out of the "muck" of our lives...out of our comfort zones, our bubbles, to take some action to support others, to be inspired by others, and to improve the world one act and one day at a time.

I hear about my grandson's soccer being canceled due to days of wildfire smoke. And I listen to my daughter-in-law, who works for New Belgium Brewing, explain the challenges of climate change on sourcing all the ingredients of their beer...water, hops, grains, yeast, bottles, cans...they are all impacted! I listen to Pope Francis in his new 11-page apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, which means ("Praise God"). The Pope addresses the letter to all people of goodwill and calls on us for concrete individual actions in response to the climate crisis. The letter's goal, writes the pope, is *"to express bluntly that this is no longer a secondary or ideological question, but a drama that harms us all."* He says that *"above all"* urgent political decisions must be made at both the national and international levels to stave off impending environmental disasters. And in the final line of the document, the pope offers a specific warning to people of faith: *'Praise God' is the title of this letter,*" writes Francis. *"For when human beings claim to take God's place, they become their own worst enemies."*

"...God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Lord, we know that your mother Mary and father Joseph taught you how to pray....and you always prayed to God your father...countless times we hear your prayers, right up to your death. Some of my earliest memories are of being tucked into bed praying with my mother: "Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep..." For all of us, Lord, in one form or another, praying to you has been an undeniable part of our lives. Lord teach us to pray as your Disciples. Help us to listen to your answers.

Dear Jesus, it is because we love you, and because we must take care of our families, and because we must we love our neighbors as ourselves, that these world problems must be a priority in our lives. This is not the time to slow down or stop being your Disciples. With gratitude and despite the "muck" in our lives, we hear your call and see your vision. We will step out in faith to do something constructive to make the Kingdom of Heaven real today for everyone. We know it will take sacrifice...the solutions won't come easily. Dear Jesus, give us faith. Make our actions sacred and holy. Thy will be done.

"On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face..."

Amen!

Cycle B 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Is 53:10-11

The LORD was pleased to crush him in infirmity. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

Reading II, Heb 4:14-16

Brothers and sisters: Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Gospel. Mk 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

The Scriptures today tell us that God loves us so much that he became one of us, and knows our temptations, our weaknesses and our suffering. Like the disciples in today's Gospel, we too often ask without thinking. Sometimes the response comes back, *"you do not know what you are asking."*

In the verses just before today's Gospel, Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem where He will suffer and die. The picture of all the horror He faces is fully before His eyes. He knows He will be crucified. He is beginning to give His last teachings and utter His last words to His disciples. He is quite concerned about what He will leave behind with those who have been His closest disciples over the past three years. Jesus has decided not to pull any punches with them. He's telling them straight out what's going to happen. He's going to Jerusalem He tells them to suffer, be crucified, and to die in order to enter into a new life.

As soon as He has poured out His heart to them, two of His closest disciples, James and John, ask Him for places of privilege. Instead of asking what they could do for Him, they selfishly ask what He can do for them. It's hard to imagine the insensitivity shown by James and John. Jesus is struggling with what it means to be the Suffering Servant for mankind in obedience to His Father's wishes, and James and John decide this is just the time for them to make their selfish bids for power. How will they become, in a just few days, the Apostles that Christ was looking for? How did they rise to become the great Apostles we know they were, not just ordinary ones?

The Last Supper was no picnic. What was given at this sacred banquet was given at a terrible cost. But, it came with Christ's love and desire to be our partner throughout our lives. He wants to be yoked to us and thus help us pull our load through life. But more than that, Jesus wants to be totally and completely a part of us. He wants His body to become our body — His blood to mingle with ours. He wants to give Himself to us completely, to share His life in ours and our life in His. His is a life of self-sacrificing service and commitment to care for us. His love of us is forever. That is how suffering becomes the wonderful gift of hope.

The disciples who would be great followed that model...and there was no other model if they were to be great...great Apostles sharing the hope of Christ.

We need to ask ourselves how we can become better Christians. You see, we need to be extraordinary Christians, because there are enough ordinary ones already. We need to be self-sacrificing and seek God in everything we do. We can't settle for less. Having Jesus in our lives is

lasting – something that we can take with us into the next life, as well as being the legacy of hope we can leave with those who have known us and loved us.

Have you ever heard of the PRAYER OF AN UNKNOWN CONFEDERATE SOLDIER? This prayer was found on the body of a soldier near the end of the Civil War. Some call it the prayer of unspoken prayers. I call it the “you do not know what you are asking” prayer. It is obviously the prayer of an extraordinary and self-sacrificing follower of Christ. Let us pray:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey...

I asked for health, that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity, that I might do better things...

I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty, that I might be wise...

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God...

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life, that I might enjoy all things...

I got nothing that I asked for...but everything I had hoped for...

Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all men, most richly blessed...Amen

Cycle C 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Ex 17:8-13

In those days, Amalek came and waged war against Israel. Moses, therefore, said to Joshua, "Pick out certain men, and tomorrow go out and engage Amalek in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him: he engaged Amalek in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israel had the better of the fight, but when he let his hands rest, Amalek had the better of the fight. Moses' hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on. Meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Reading II, 2 Tm 3:14-4:2

Beloved: Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed, because you know from whom you learned it, and that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching.

Gospel, Lk 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary. He said, "There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, 'Render a just decision for me against my adversary.' For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, 'While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike

me.'" The Lord said, "Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The Scriptures today are NOT about praying until we get what we want. Rather, the readings encourage us to pray so that we might have faith and trust to wait and listen for all of God's answers. It is then that we will see how much God loves us. And then, we will come to understand that prayer is a 2-way communication: we pray with faith and hope that He will be open to our requests, but more importantly, we must be trusting to accept God's answers in His time. As the Gospel says, pray always without becoming weary even when it is not convenient or not what we expected.

We are not just talking about individual prayer, however. The 1st reading told us how the Israelites benefited when Moses was supported by his community. Let me go so far as to say that today we couldn't survive without each other. And what is true in life is true in prayer. We love being individuals until we experience needs, losses, suffering or fear. While we are invited to kneel down right in the middle of it all and have faith, you know that we can't always do that...sometimes we just don't feel like praying, or worse, we can't pray. But also recognize that we are a community not just a group of individuals. Salvation is unfolding differently in each of our lives, but it is not simply our own search for God, or our personal blessings that are most important. We must develop as a community of believers supporting each other and reaching out to help others...Jesus died for all mankind... People need to know how much God loves them.

When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on earth? Maybe the question is, when we return to God, will He find His love imbedded deeply in our hearts and in the activities of our lives? Will He find us as persistent as the widow in today's Gospel to share the love of God? Only we can answer those questions.

So, today I offer a prayer in the words from a favorite song...it's a prayer to restore compassionate care for the poor, the hated, the needy, the hopeless, the sick, the abused, the vulnerable, the innocent, the unborn and their parents, the immigrants, the refugees, the undocumented, the homeless, the marginalized, the LGBTQ, those with special needs...for the other...we pray to restore compassionate care for living creatures and mother earth...and, for all mankind, even those without a heart to serve others.

Dear Lord,

Maybe it's true what they say
about
Maybe we can't make the ends
meet
Maybe we'll all have to do
without
Maybe this world's just
incomplete
Well, we all look for truth in
this life
Searching with hope inside
If it's so hard living in a
desperate world
We all do the best that we can!

Some people see a change
Some will remain the same
Others will live their lives
under the gun
Some see the road as clear
Some say the end is here
They say it's a hopeless fight
But I say, we gotta try
Oh yes, we've got to try!

Maybe it's too much to think
about
Maybe there ain't nothin' left to
say
But if our time is really runnin'
out
Then this ain't no time to run
away
Cause we're destined to look
For the truth in this life
Searching with tearful eyes
If it's so hard livin' in a
desperate world
Then tell me Lord, why was I
born?

Some people see a change
Some will remain the same
Others will live their lives
under the gun
Some see the road as clear
Some say the end is here
They say it's a hopeless fight
But I say, we gotta try
Oh yes, we've got to try!

Someone's tryin'
Someone's cryin' out
While we live under the gun
Someone's livin'
Someone's givin' up
But I say, we gotta try!

AMEN!

Cycle B 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 3, 2024

Gospel Starts at 16:30

Homily Starts at 18:30

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 DT 6:2-6

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life. Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe them that you may grow and prosper the more, in keeping with the promise of the LORD, the God of your fathers, to give you a land flowing with milk and honey. "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today."

Reading 2 HEB 7:23-28

Brothers and sisters: The levitical priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.

Gospel MK 12:28B-34

One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to

him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!"

This cry struck a deep chord in the sons and daughters of Israel. Throughout their long and turbulent history this cry always forced the Jewish people back to a consciousness of their origins and their national purpose. This was the cry of Moses when God first formed the Israelites into a nation. It was the First Commandment...and it was the re-forming commandment when restoration of Judaism was needed.

The Old Testament tells us there came a time when ideas and concepts about God and about who He was were attempted...but they failed because God is free to be who He is in His mystery and cannot be restricted by our human and limited concepts.

There came a time when the Jewish people saw God as exclusively identified with the Promised Land, with the land flowing with milk and honey. Only those living there were God's beloved. This led to religious elitism, the elitism of the Chosen. They saw God as having nothing to do with the Gentiles.

There came a time when God was identified by the Jews exclusively with their Temple in Jerusalem. God worked exclusively, they thought, through the Temple's priests. Eventually they expanded that and saw God's kingdom as present only through Jewish kings.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!" was the constant cry of the ancient Jewish prophets, those men who called Israel back from its wayward ways to its original purpose, while recognizing that God cannot be limited by human concepts and images. He is limitless and human concepts cannot confine Him.

We are the Gentiles, descendants of those who shaped the culture of Western Civilization. Our Western history is filled with accounts of kings and queens who claimed they ruled by divine right. The British monarchy's history is one steeped in that notion, a notion so powerful and pervasive that the system of English Common Law, which our law is based on, was developed to protect the little people from the whims and tyrannies of British kings and queens who acted as if they alone understood God's will. That's why our own Declaration of Independence grounds our dignity on rights that are endowed upon us by our Creator, rights that exist in our nature that were put there by God alone, not by any king, queen, president, congress, or court.

Accepting the Lordship of God means accepting His order of reality, His concern for all mankind, and the destiny He has put before us. God lives

in His creation and above all lives in His creatures whom He made in His own image and likeness. Accepting the Lordship of God necessarily entails loving our neighbors. It means loving everyone as God loves us, caring for each other as God cares for us. As Catholics we share ourselves in the Eucharist because in Eucharist, we share the God who made us... the Body and Blood of God the Son Jesus, who in His humanity has been filled with God's divinity.

Jesus tells us that we are not far from God's kingdom. Blessed are the poor in spirit He tells us, we shall have freedom and shall not be shackled by our possessions. Blessed are you when men and women revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you because you hold to God's values. The Scriptures speak what we need to hear: *"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!"*

But we need not despair in the face of evil. In the past and even now there are forces around us that would twist and deform what God wants to do in our world. But we know through the Prophets that all that has been de-formed can be re-formed. Despair and retreat into our own little world are the surest paths to hell. Remember that despair is Satan's greatest victory. Despair is the hell in which Satan forever lives. But accepting God's Lordship over us means accepting and living out His order and values in our world. We must never sell out and never give up. Our re-formation is possible only and unless we believe that it can happen because God is at work in our lives.

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord Alone!"

Cycle B 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 1 KGS 17:10-16

In those days, Elijah the prophet went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." She left to get it, and he called out after her, "Please bring along a bit of bread." She answered, "As the LORD, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a couple of sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid. Go and do as you propose. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Then you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says, 'The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" She left and did as Elijah had said. She was able to eat for a year, and he and her son as well; the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah.

Reading 2 HEB 9:24-28

Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice. Just as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment, so also Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

Gospel MK 12:38-44

He sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

20 years ago in June 2004, we were in Rome Italy for our son Christopher's and daughter-in-law Sonia's wedding. Sonia was born in Rome, and when she was 5 or 6 years old, she chose the church where she wanted to be married: Santa Maria in Aracoeli. It's between the Roman Forum and the white marble monument of the tomb of Italy's unknown soldier known as the "Wedding Cake." At the wedding reception, one of Sonia's uncles asked if he could say a few words. He told us that he wanted us to know how much Italy loves America. "In 3 weeks," he said, "it's the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Rome by the American Army! I was there when the American tanks rumbled into Rome...you have no idea how much we love America...you freed us from the Nazis!" I'm telling you the hair stood up on the back of my neck that day!

As President Ronald Reagan once said, *"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We don't pass it to our children in their bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."*

This Monday we have an extraordinary opportunity for unity in this time of disunity, to be One Nation under God as we celebrate Veterans Day. I am honored and privileged to ask our Veterans to stand as we pray for them:

Dear Jesus, we ask your blessings for all who have served their country in the armed forces defending freedom and safety. May their call to service continue in their lives in many positive ways. We ask for healing of the Veterans who have been wounded, in body and soul, in conflicts around the globe. We pray especially for the men and women, who are still coming home with injured bodies and traumatized spirits. Help us bring your love to them Lord Jesus. Help us to pray for them when they cannot pray. Have mercy on all Veterans from past wars. Bring peace to their souls and peace to the regions where they were deployed.

I want to recognize another group who too often are overlooked...our unsung heroes who endured loneliness and trauma and greatly sacrificed in support of their spouses and parents and siblings ...would the families of our Veterans please stand up as well.

Lord Jesus, we know our Veterans don't just go to war, but they also make the peace...as Pope Francis prayed at Assisi: "...[may] *the world become a family of people. May we carry out our responsibility of building an authentic peace, attentive to the real needs of all individuals and people, capable of preventing conflicts through a cooperation that*

triumphs over hate and overcomes barriers through encounter and dialogue. Nothing is lost when we effectively enter into dialogue. Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace.” Lord Jesus, give us strength to change the world...make us weary of fighting and make us affirm the life of every human being. Hear our prayer, Lord Jesus, we beg you, hear our prayer.

Dear Veterans and families, may God Bless you + Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen [Applause]....Please be seated.

For me Veterans Day has a bittersweet shroud of seriousness and sadness about it. I can't help but think about my friends and family who fought in wars, and died, or came home wounded and changed in many ways. I see flags everywhere: in yards, in parades and in cemeteries. I see proud Veterans and your families, and I know we don't fully appreciate what you went through...or what you may still be going through. Today I want us to try to lift that pall of foreboding sadness and memories better left unsaid. I want us to celebrate this Veterans Day with the faith and hope in our hearts called out in today's Scripture readings. We salute our Veterans and your families unselfish service defending freedom and our safety. In many ways your self-sacrifice is proof that God's kingdom has begun.

On this Sunday I'm reminded that one question you and I face is this: *"What do we give God?"* Do we give Him what's left over after we've taken care of everything else? Or do we give God what we're living for, with all our hearts? We have much, and we can give God much. We can give God our trust and our dependence upon Him. Take our daily efforts, for instance, are we trying to accomplish our purpose or God's purpose? They can be the same, you know. We can make God's purpose our purpose. Caring for the ones we love is giving our lives to God. Providing for others is making God's purpose our purpose. Working for peace, responding to hatred with love, working for justice and fairness in our world, protecting freedom, and self-sacrifice are all about giving our lives to God.

Let's be clear about something. The Gospel today is not about God being interested in our money. He has all the riches He will ever need. No, God wants more than our money. God wants us. He wants to be part of our daily life. He wants to be what we depend on each day. He wants to be what we live for...with all our hearts!

Our giving to God could be giving Him back what's already His in the first place. But what about giving God our hearts like the widows in today's readings? Ah, that's something else...that's an added dimension!

The gift from our hearts is what He's looking for. It's our gift to Him each time we pray. And when we give Him our love, when we give Him our lives, our interests and purpose, what He will give back to us cannot be measured. We can have hearts and souls as trusting, as full of faith, as loving and as generous as those widows whose stories we have just heard!

God loves us so much that He wants to be united with us forever...He promises to strengthen us, to be with us and to raise us to new life. We can give our lives in service to others with our whole hearts, even when we could face death...just ask a Veteran.

Let us again salute our Veterans and their families unselfish service defending freedom and our safety, back home and around the world. In many ways their self-sacrifice is proof that God's kingdom has begun....right here...right now...One Nation under God.

Amen

Cycle A 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 19, 2023

Gospel starts at 15:18

Homily starts at 18:37

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 PRV 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize. She brings him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She obtains wool and flax and works with loving hands. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle. She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy. Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting; the woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her a reward for her labors, and let her works praise her at the city gates.

Reading 2 1 THES 5:1-6

Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you.

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. When people are saying, "Peace and security," then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.

Gospel MT 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "A man going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one...to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward

bringing the additional five. He said, 'Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.' Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, 'Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.' His master said to him in reply, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'"

The gospel readings of last weekend, this weekend and next weekend are taken from the 24th and 25th chapters of St. Matthew. These teachings are Christ's last ones before He was to enter Jerusalem and be put to death. They are His final testament to His disciples, intended to guide them, and us, in the time that is between His life here on earth and His Second Coming at the end of the world. These final teachings, which bring us to the end of the Church year, should be of great importance to us. When we analyze them in depth, they are challenging ...maybe even disturbing.

- Last week's parable told us about the five wise and the five foolish virgins. The wise lived life fully in the present, but they were vigilant and prepared with an eye to the future. The foolish ones did not look ahead or make provisions for the coming of the bridegroom.
- Today's parable continues the theme of preparedness by two good stewards who took calculated risks, as well as a third servant who lacked courage, who was fear-driven, and who consequently was unproductive. This servant, like the foolish virgins, looked for an excuse. He was fooling himself by denying his own responsibilities and the consequences of his actions. We have to wonder what happened in his life that caused him to act this way. I have to say that scholars tell us that the Master in this Gospel is NOT God. That's good to know because he bothered me by the way he acted, especially toward the third servant.
- Next weekend we will be hearing that what we do for others, we do for Christ. Christ identifies with those in need...He looks at us through their eyes. The kingdom of God is established through those simple acts of kindness that reach deep into our hearts.

I trust we understand that all these parables are really talking to us about having faith. You see, Christ is in all these parables asking us and challenging us to have faith, to make faith-based decisions, to boldly act on faith. Faith is the engine that drives us. And faith isn't something we can hide and hold only for ourselves. It needs to be invested in the lives of others and only then can it be multiplied...Only then can it possibly bear fruit...Only then can our world get better. We were given faith not simply to save our own skins; God loves us so much that He gives us the gift of faith to change the world....to help save the world!

God has given us enormous treasures and talents through Jesus His Son. We have the power that God has given us, but we need to understand that Jesus is interested in productivity. He isn't looking for passive, hesitant people to follow Him and be His agents here on earth. He wants

risk-takers to be His followers, like the two good servants...daring people who will activate His Church to benefit the world. Being a Christian without courage is being a Christian without taking risks. God encourages us to jump into life and run the risk of really making a difference.

As a Deacon for over 20 years, I have been privileged to be involved with many diverse ministries. I am recognizing a common theme running through all of them: invariably families are profoundly impacted by our ministries. And it is not just those ministered to who benefit. When we take our experience of ministry back to our families, it changes the dynamic of our own family for the better as well. I see that when we take risks to invest our faith in the lives of others that everyone's faith is multiplied...I see everywhere that it is bearing fruit...I see how even serving one person at a time benefits multiple families, which makes our community and our world, better.

Several years ago, I attended with 8 of my fellow parishioners a profound Archdiocese conference hosted by the Fortunate and Faithful Families ministry. I heard heart-wrenching stories from courageous parents and their children about judgement and bullying, about demeaning slurs and threats aimed at them. They shared their feeling of isolation and rejection, of doubt and pain, not only at school and work, but unfortunately at church as well. They didn't want to be fixed...they just wanted their families to be loved and accepted and allowed to worship. Two priests gave testimony on how they and their congregations are being loving homes by welcoming everyone. I was moved to tell one mom to please not to give up on us, the Body of Christ...that we would try to be more sensitive and caring of them and their gay children.

These last Sundays of the Church year, ought to challenge us...even disturb us. While it is true that Jesus is kind and merciful, and that He loves us unconditionally, it is likewise true that He has great and high expectations of each one of us. After all, God our Father didn't create us to do nothing. It's what He created us for that ought to occupy our attention, disturb our conscience, and in fact prod us into being productive for Him. I mean, if we don't serve others in need now, how can we ever reveal God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven?

Cycle B 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 17, 2024

Gospel Starts at 21:27

Homily Starts at 23:23

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading I, DN 12:1-3

In those days, I Daniel, heard this word of the Lord: "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. "But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

Reading II, HEB 10:11-14, 18

Brothers and sisters: Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

Gospel, MK 13:24-32

Jesus said to his disciples: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. "And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky. "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

In these final weeks of the Church year, we hear some vivid and frightening apocalyptic scriptures about the eschaton, the end times. They are a vision of the final struggle of humanity at the end of times and our subsequent resurrection; either a life of horror or a life of glory. They are a message of challenge, and hope. Apocalyptic scripture is a literary style designed to give severe warning to the oppressors, encourage and give hope to the oppressed, and it always looks ahead to the time when God will triumph. The problem I have is that when I first read these apocalyptic scriptures, I just didn't feel God's love. They are difficult to interpret, so it's hard to read them and then NOT fearfully imagine we are in the end times. All around us, the world is overwhelmed by immense challenges—life threatening violence, illness, starvation, displacement, and a shared longing for peace and justice. These are heavy times, and feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, and despair are deeply felt by many around the world. So what's the answer, "Life is hard and then we die?" Well, I don't buy that! I think the answer is in today's Gospel, when Jesus tells us that all things are in God's loving hands. His love reigned over chaos at the time of creation, so too will He reign at the end of time...in His heavenly creation! The lesson to be learned is "Be Prepared!"

The famous theologian C. S. Lewis tells us that *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, He speaks to us in our conscience, but He shouts to us in our pain...suffering is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."* The Scriptures today shout at us so we will wake up to hear their message of warning and hope...and to do something with great love! God loves us so much that His son Jesus suffered and died once...and...for...all, paying the price for our sins. And He promised that at the end of time He will return.... Good will triumph over evil. Jesus never said life would be easy, He said He would be with us always. And He said, "follow me!"

So, today, this day, this moment, is the time to lean into God's love. Believe me, I'm an old guy...78 years old...I have seen this before, and I see God's love everywhere. Good is winning! His kingdom has begun! Yes, it may get worse...but it's not the end until God says so. And it will get better again! We need to seize the day, be His hands and feet caring for others around us. We shouldn't shrink away, paralyzed in our despair. God knows...the world needs us! Our lives and the lives of those around us can be better only if we trust in God....Maybe in the world's pain He's shouting to wake us up so we can live prepared for the end by doing something today "for the Love of God!"...if we hold onto Jesus, confident He is with us, loving us...we will wake up every day to be Eucharist for the world, being the Body of Christ caring for each other, so we all will be prepared, no matter what comes our way.

I would like to tell you a true story about the Boettcher family; mother, father and two young daughters, who emigrated from Germany to the United States around the year 1900. The oldest daughter Frieda could always remember living as a child in Berlin and looking down from a 2nd story window seeing soldiers riding on horses past their apartment. They came through Ellis Island and settled in South Dakota. The family owned a store and a boarding house for traveling workers. Life could not have been that easy. 11 years later disaster struck. The youngest daughter Emma was pregnant. The family was so scandalized that they immediately sold the business and moved to upper Saskatchewan, Canada. They bought a square mile of land for a \$1 land grant and settled just outside the town of Prince Albert, 60 miles north of Saskatoon. It's in the boonies today, imagine what it was back then. On Christmas Day 1911 a baby boy was born. The winter was so brutally cold the family legend was that the baby was wrapped up in a blanket and was placed in a turkey pan on the open door of the wood burning oven to keep him warm. Over 110 years ago that 16-year-old single-mother Emma, her baby and the Boettcher family were truly living a time of unsurpassed distress....and I have no doubt that they were holding onto Jesus for dear life prepared for the worst, knowing that life as they knew it had ended..... But then, during the next 2 1/2 years some things happened: Emma was married...Tony her husband adopted her son...they had a daughter Kay, and the babies were baptized at the Catholic Sacred Heart Cathedral in Prince Albert....once again, life as they knew it had ended, this time for the better. You might have guessed, the baby boy was my father...I never met my Grandma Emma, but I grew up knowing my Grandpa Fraser and Aunt Kay...and I met my Great Aunt Frieda on her 90th birthday.

The constant challenge of our lives is to live sensibly at all times...we think that means to be in control. But when irrational things and events throw our lives into turmoil, being in control of anything, let alone most things can be difficult if not impossible.

Our lives can be made more joyful and much better, or more difficult, depending on what we are holding onto. If we are holding onto Jesus, we can work through the most difficult times, and we will be drawn into that future beyond all futures...the endless love of eternity with Jesus Christ and our loved ones. If we are still grasping at all the things of this world, however, then we may end up living in hopeless struggle.

A sensible life is to take each day and live as Jesus taught us, as decently as we can, as loving as we can, helping others get through their day, and being kinder than necessary...because we know that everyone we meet is fighting some kind of battle. Today, this day, this moment is the time

to lean into God's love. Trust me, I'm an old guy...I've seen this before. Good is winning! God knows, the world needs us to be Eucharist, to be the Body of Christ caring for each other, so we are all prepared, no matter what comes our way! Amen

[If I could take another minute, I would like to tell you how my father's story ended. 22 years ago, it was 4 months after he attended my ordination, he died in the lobby of his Lutheran Church after having communion. I didn't know he was baptized Catholic until we found the certificate going through his personal effects. At his funeral, I asked the minister if I could assist and do anything. He declined my help, which turned out to be the right decision. I was in no shape emotionally to read or even lead a prayer during the service. But then afterwards, the minister approached me saying that the cemetery was a two-hour drive away and he couldn't go there and get back in time for another service...he asked if I could do the grave side committal? The funeral director was Catholic and was prepared with the Order of Christian Funerals book, the Holy Water and a Deacon stole. I like to say that my Dad was baptized Catholic and I buried him Catholic, but during his life he wandered around a little.☺]

Cycle C 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 MAL 3:19-20A

Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts. But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

Reading 2 2 THES 3:7-12

Brothers and sisters: You know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.

Gospel LK 21:5-19

While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here-- the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?" He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky. "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony.

Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

When we hear today's Scriptures we can tell we're coming to the end of the church year and that Advent is near. They tell us what we need to understand about the end times," "The Day of the Lord." So, it's time to dig into these Scriptures; it's time to peel back the layers and learn what is not to be feared...the end times will be a joyous time when the whole world will come to understand that God created mankind not for sin and death, but for eternal life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is in the great temple and in just a few days He will be arrested and put to death. He's in this beautiful temple that was recently expanded and improved. And everybody comes in awe of the temple, how beautiful it is, this monument to the presence of God. And everybody admired, of course, the costly stones and votive offerings... Finally, Jesus had enough of it and says, "All that you see here...the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

No doubt the Jewish people thought Jesus was speaking of the horrendous end times when the ultimate desolation would happen. They feared the end times but also believed that out of that desolation would come something special, for The Messiah, The Christ would come and rescue them all. And so it was...they managed to have hope.

When the people asked Jesus, "When is this going to happen? What sign will there be?" He responded in a surprising way: "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name.... do not be terrified; for such things must happen first...nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plagues; and awesome sights and mighty signs coming from the sky...you will be hated and some even killed." We know that in history, and in fact in our own lifetimes, we know that all of these things have actually happened around the world. So what was He saying? First of all, Jesus was saying: "Yes, the world will do what the world does. There will be destruction...people crying for peace, but there is no peace...people suffering, but there is no healing...The selfishness and arrogance of man will continue to mock and laugh at the ways of those of us who follow God, who believe, who hope and who love."

But then Jesus adds something, and this is the main point, the Good News: "It will lead to your giving testimony...Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute." He promises them, and us, with these words: "...not a hair on

your heads will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives.” But how, we ask? It’s because our faith and trust is in God...not in men. When we give our testimony, when we act in concert with the mission of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves in places of persecution and wisdom and courage. We will never turn away from innocent people suffering. We will be transformed by Christ into the courageous people who give our testimony as we stand up for justice when enough is enough. And others will have hope because of our actions born in the promises of Jesus. And the whole world will come to understand that God created mankind not for sin and death, but for eternal life. Richard Rohr recently said it this way, “We cannot think our way into being transformed. We must live ourselves into it...often weeping our way through it.”

For the ancient Jews, the Roman armies made Jesus’ prophecy come true in 70 AD. The army came down with great anger to stop a rebellion and ended up ravaging the whole of Israel. They smashed into Jerusalem and starved the people and crushed the temple into dust. Over a million people died in that terrible outrage. Only one temple foundation wall was left standing which people still go to see today, it’s called the Western Wall. Then the Jews were scattered all over the world. They were not allowed to return to their sacred city of Jerusalem. And it seemed it was the end times...But we of faith know that the end with God is never the end...with God the end is always new beginning. And so it was...those scattered Jews began to shake off the dust of defeat...and they rebuilt their faith and trust in Yahweh, and their hope for the future as God’s Chosen People of the Old Covenant.

The early Christians were also persecuted during that terrible time and for hundreds of years after. They too were living the dreadful prophecy of Jesus, but they expected that He would soon return to judge the living and the dead. As they suffered, they began to be transformed to better understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of a New Covenant. That new beginning gave them, and us, a mission to reach out with God’s gifts of faith and hope to all people...with gifts of love and mercy, God’s unconditional love was shared with all people. And that mission of perseverance never stopped reaching out to the ends of the earth for the last 2000 years. It’s why we live transformed lives of faith and trust today in the love of Jesus Christ.

Today’s readings are a lesson in history, and the lesson is this...as Yogi Berra, the great Yankee baseball player once said, “It ain’t over till it’s over.” It’s not over until God ends it. And when He does, it will be a

time of great joy and triumph as all mankind and the world will see, though the justice and mercy and love of Jesus Christ, that God's creation will enter a new way of life...sin and death will be gone, and all life will be eternal in His love.

So, at times of stress and strain, at times when we feel that things are collapsing all around us, whether it is in our nation, or in other nations, facing terrible tragedies...right now...whether it is groups of people who are being relentlessly persecuted...whether it is our own loved ones sick or dying...whenever we face this feeling that it's over and all is being destroyed, and there's no going back and there's no going forward. Whenever we feel that we are tired, weary even of doing good, that is the time to persevere! That is the time to remember and trust Jesus... He never said, "Life would be easy," He said "I will be with you always!" He never said, "Worship me," He said, "Follow me." We are the proof that He transforms sinners into saints!

Jesus understands what we are going through because He was human like us. He too suffered and died, but His New Covenant was born in His Resurrection. It seemed it was the end. But the end with God is never the end; with God the end is always a new beginning.

It ain't over till God says it's over...until then, we persevere in the love of Jesus Christ!

And, the Church says AMEN!

Cycle A Christ the King

Reading I, Ez 34:11-12, 15-17

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest, says the Lord GOD. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly. As for you, my sheep, says the Lord GOD, I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.

Reading II, 1 Cor 15:20-26, 28

Brothers and sisters: Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through man, the resurrection of the dead came also through man. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

Gospel, Mt 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Hell is real...It exists...There is no doubt.

In today's Gospel parable, He warns that those who neglect the needs of the poor will go off "*to eternal punishment.*" Would it surprise you to know the Biblical figure who speaks most often of Hell and damnation is none other than Jesus Himself? Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus warns about "Gehenna" and the everlasting fire. Today when the Church says that Hell exists, it means that rejecting God's love is a real possibility. "Gehenna" or "Hell" are images for the lonely and sad condition of our free will to refuse the offer of the divine life. But is there anyone in this state of being we ask? The Church has never claimed to know if any human being is actually in Hell. We don't know for sure. So, there is a question about Hell that I find fascinating and pertinent to the Scriptures today. "Is Hell empty or full?" A controversy in 2011 percolated around a book published by well-known evangelical preacher Rob Bell. In Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived, Bell advocates the "universalist" position on salvation, where everyone in the end is saved and that Hell, accordingly, is empty.

Over the years our great Catholic theologians have powerfully stated positions on Hell. In the 3rd century, Origen of Alexandria, who is a remarkable and influential theologian in our Catholic tradition, stated that all sinners—and indeed even the fallen angels, perhaps even Satan himself—would be, through Christ's grace, brought to salvation in the end. There might be hellfire, Origen thought, but it cannot be everlasting. For if it were, sin would prove more powerful than God's grace. Well, the Church rejected Origen's universalism for she saw it as disrespectful of free will, both human and angelic. If God's grace is simply irresistible, then the real freedom to reject God's love is compromised.

In the wake of this condemnation, theologians moved to the other end of the spectrum. St. Augustine, 5th century bishop of Hippo, held that original sin had produced a *massa damnata* (a damned mass) of human beings, out of which God, in his inscrutable grace, has picked a few privileged souls. Thus, Augustine clearly believed that the vast majority of the human race would be damned to Hell. St. Thomas Aquinas followed Augustine in holding that a very large number of people are Hell-bound; Aquinas even taught that among the pleasures that the saints in heaven enjoy is the contemplation of the suffering of the damned!

Then, in the 12th century, the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar argued another viewpoint. He said that given what God has accomplished in Christ, we may reasonably hope that all will be saved.

The prior condemnation of Origen's doctrine did however compel him to hesitate from saying that we actually know for certain that all will be saved. But von Balthasar's keen sensitivity to the dramatic power of the Cross convinced him that we may have the realistic hope that all, human and angelic, will eventually be drawn into God's divine love. In 2024, Pope Francis was asked what he thought about hell. The pope responded that hell is "difficult to imagine" and added that, in his personal opinion, he "likes to think hell is empty; I hope it is." There are many theologies, but only one faith. So who is right?

Today is the last Sunday of the Church year when we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. Next week we will begin the new Church year starting with Advent, our time waiting for the birth of Jesus into the world. Although death and sorrow and sin had been on the rampage though out history, Christmas is the season that we celebrate Jesus bringing light and peace and wholeness into the world.

The Gospel parable today tells us who will receive this light and peace. The standard is very clear. Have we cared for the hungry? Have we given water to the thirsty? What about welcoming the stranger, and giving clothes to those with none? And what about visiting people in a hospital or prison? This is what Jesus did in his life on earth. And these are the loving outreach ministries that He has entrusted to us who are His body.

If we have not joined this group, if we are stubborn in our free will to reject God, we should not be surprised when at the end of our lives God says, *"You never did pass on to others the love I gave to you. You did not let me into your life. If you had, your gratitude would have prompted you to care for others! I would love to shepherd you even now, but here is what I can do: First, I will affirm the choice you have made with your life, even if you have chosen to live without me, your God, I will respect your choice. Second, I will never stop loving you, nor leave you!"*

You see, this is how a King acts. He respects and honors his subjects' needs and desires. The parable says that not everyone will be among God's beloved herd of sheep. Some people will be goats instead. But, where does it say that God stops loving us even if we stubbornly banish ourselves to Hell? In fact, in Romans St. Paul tells us that our gift of faith is the enactment of God's mercy, not our human will, that decides. And, he continues *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* And, I say, "I agree!"

The existence of Hell is very real. Some say that God “sends” people to Hell, but this is misleading. As C.S. Lewis put it so memorably: *“the door that closes us into Hell is locked from the inside, not from the outside.”* We humans are free to choose, yes, and there can be no doubt that rejecting God’s divine love has consequences and results in suffering. Yet, we may, indeed we should hope as Pope Francis did, that God’s grace, in the end, will transform even the worst sinner...on earth, or in Hell. My mother and my wife’s love have helped me understand this concept of how love can transform us.

Many Catholics think that von Balthasar was on the right track. Our Catholic doctrine is that Hell exists. Yet, we don’t know for sure if anyone is actually in Hell. However, we are permitted to hope and to pray that all sinners, even those in Hell, will finally be transformed by the constant love and mercy of God’s grace.

So, what matters to us today? Jesus said it in today’s Gospel: *“...whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.”* Like Jesus, our identity here on earth is not found in what we do for ourselves, it is found in what we do for others. And just as Jesus touched people, we have opportunities to touch others throughout our lives. All we have to do is participate in caring for others. In fact, I would go so far as to say we can’t live without God and each other in our lives!

Never doubt that through our efforts, the grace of Christ the King is changing the world. And somewhere He is transforming a sinner with His love and forgiveness.

God’s love is real...It exists...There is no doubt!

Cycle B Christ the King

November 21, 2021

Gospel Start at 15:20

Homily Start at 16:45

<https://deaconrogerfraser.com/>

Reading 1 Daniel 7:13-14

As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

Reading 2 Revelation 1:5-8

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him. Yes. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

Gospel John 18:33B-37

Pilate said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

No doubt we are still dealing with the impact on our health and wellbeing by Covid-19 as we continue to hear about senseless violence and acts of hatred around the world every day. Hatred is palpable as we see division here at home and in the Church, we see the global decline in democracy, the rise in racism and autocratic ideology, and we hear about ongoing violent devastation in Haiti, Afghanistan, and Venezuela, to name a few. All of these threaten us and feed our fears. We all recognize that there are dark forces surrounding people throughout the world. Hatred in many forms attacks our cultures and religions without regard to human dignity and life. The chaotic situation today seems like it is not that different from that of a 100 years ago...it was a time when World War I had been fought and the Treaty of Versailles, while ending that war, had at the same time laid the groundwork for World War II. In 1924, with Germany in economic ruin, Adolph Hitler published his book *Mein Kampf*. Nazism was gaining power. It advocated radical nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism. Other dark storm clouds were gathering as well. Atheistic Communism was sinking its roots into Russian soil. The leaders of many political systems hated the Catholic Church.

So it was, on December 11, 1925 that Pope Pius XI, instituted the feast of Christ the King in response to the growing secularism and nationalism, and in the context of the unresolved "Roman Question" of papal sovereignty over Vatican City. Pius XI stated that all people can enter this kingdom, whoever they are and from wherever they are "*since this kingdom is opposed to none other than Satan and to the power of darkness.*" You see, this kingdom welcomes all kingdoms and all people.

Someone once said, "*If there is no divine being above us, we will be consumed by all that is around us.*" If Christ in His kingship is removed from our lives, we will be at the mercy of any and all forces in this world that are more powerful than our own...We have only to look at the world to know this.

But today the Scriptures tell us that God loves mankind so much that Jesus is the King of all creation. We are reminded how great the Lord God is as He named Himself the *Alpha and the Omega...the one who is and who was and who is to come...the almighty*. How fitting it is that we celebrate Jesus this way on the last Sunday of the Church Year...with the faith that Jesus Christ is our Lord and King. Did you know that since 1970 we celebrate Christ the King on this last Sunday of Ordinary Time, before Advent, along with Protestant churches such as the Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans and others?

As Christians we *belong to the truth* because we listen to Jesus Christ our King. He establishes His justice and peace among us. But in order to do so, He relies on each of us to act in our own way. He relies on our love. And He relies on the gift of our very lives and souls, in order to reveal His kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven to all mankind.

We often hear words that challenge us to be *“in the world but not of the world.”* As Christians we are called to deeply love as we engage our surrounding world. Our Catholic faith calls us not to escape our world but rather to bring forth holiness amidst all that is unholy. He made us into *“a kingdom, priests for His God and Father.”* That means you and I with our Baptismal priesthood are in God’s power, to consecrate and sanctify the world by helping to restore its original holiness, the holiness in which God created it. The world is our altar, and down upon it we call a God-given power of love to overcome fear, hatred, racism, exploitation, poverty, and death of innocent lives. Far from fleeing this world, we are called to enter into it, all the while praying to our Father: *“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*

This is the way it is in Christ’s kingdom. And, if Christ’s kingdom is to be revealed here on earth, made real in our world as it is in heaven, we must work to make it so. Do we expect God to give it all to us without any effort on our part, in spite of our indifference, our neglect, our rejection of Him...our sin? That would be nonsense. That would be foolish. In fact, that would be arrogant on our part, expecting that God will do it all for us anyway, even though we pay scant attention to Him and give Him little, if anything, of our hearts and souls. *“If there is no divine being above us, we will be consumed by all that is around us.”*

But as the Gospel says, we *belong to the truth* because we listen to Christ our King...the powers of this world will never rule us or hold us in their grip. With God our Father and Christ our King, we will never betray each other. He relies on each of us to act in our own way, He relies on our love, and He relies on the gift of our very lives and souls, in order to reveal His kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven ...to all mankind.

I would like to share the brief letter of a widower, Antione Leiris, who lost his wife Helene in the November 2015 terrorist attacks that killed 130 people and wounded 416 others in Paris:

On Friday evening you stole the life of an exceptional person, the love of my life, the mother of my son, but you will not have my hatred. So no, I will not give you the satisfaction of hating you. You want it, but to

respond to hatred with anger would be to give in to the same ignorance that made you what you are.

You would like me to be scared, for me to look at my fellow citizens with a suspicious eye, for me to sacrifice my liberty for my security. You have lost. The player still plays.

I saw her this morning. At last, after nights and days of waiting. She was as beautiful as when she left on Friday evening, as beautiful as when I fell head over heels in love with her more than 12 years ago. Of course I am devastated with grief, I grant you this small victory, but it will be short-lived. I know she will be with us every day and we will find each other in the heaven for free souls...

Us two, my son and I, we will be stronger than every army in the world. I cannot waste any more time on you as I must go back to [my son] who has just woken from his sleep. He is only just 17 months old, he is going to eat his snack just like every other day, then we are going to play like every other day and all his life this little boy will be happy and free. Because you will never have his hatred either.

I once read that the attitude of the French people was not one of retaliation, but of defiance. Now I understand what that can mean. It's how another journey of justice and peace, of love, of mercy and forgiveness in the face of hatred can begin.

You know, people who think they hate us have no idea what they are up against! We *belong to the truth* because we listen to Jesus Christ our King!

Grandpa's Playlist

Gather some friends or family together with your smartphones. Take turns playing your favorite songs...someone play from my list too. (**"At St. Andrew" added songs in Bold**)
See deaconrogerfraser.com for access to the Youtube Music Playlist link.

1. Adele – Rolling in the Deep
2. **Ambrosia - How Much I Feel**
3. **Andrea Bocelli – Canto Della Terra**
4. Andrea Bocelli – Con Te Partiro
5. Andrea Bocelli – Nessun Dorma
6. **Anita Baker – Caught Up In The Rapture**
7. **Anita Baker – Been So Long**
8. **Annie Lennox – Why**
9. **Anne Quigley – There is a Longing**
10. Art of Noise – Moments of Love
11. B.J. Thomas – Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head
12. Barbara Lewis – Hello Stranger
13. Barbra Streisand & Barry Gibb – Guilty
14. **Beach Boys – Caroline, No**
15. Billy Idol – Eyes Without A Face
16. **Billy Joel – Vienna**
17. **Billy Joel – We Didn't Start The Fire**
18. Billy Preston & Syreeta Wright – With You I'm Born Again
19. **Bob Dylan – The Times They are a Changin'**
20. **Brenton Wood – Gimme Little Sign**
21. Brenton Wood – Oogum Boogum
22. Buddy Holly – Peggy Sue
23. **Chic – Good Times**
24. Chris Tomlin – Your Grace Is Enough
25. **Chumbawamba – Tubthumping**
26. **Cream – Sunshine of Your Love**
27. Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young – Woodstock
28. **Crowded House – Don't Dream It's Over**
29. **Darlene Zschech – Shout To The Lord**
30. **David Byrne – American Utopia – Burning Down The House**
31. **David Byrne – American Utopia – Once In a Lifetime**

- 32. David Byrne – American Utopia – Road To Nowhere**
- 33. David Byrne – American Utopia – Slippery People**
34. Don McLean – American Pie
- 35. Earth, Wind & Fire – September**
36. Elton John – Mona Lisas and Mad Hatters
37. Ed Sheeran – Thinking Out Loud
38. Ephraim Lewis – Drowning in Your Eyes
- 39. Etta James – At Last**
- 40. Fleetwood Mac – Go your Own Way**
- 41. Francis Lai – A Man and A Woman – Un Homme et Une Femme**
42. Gary Broolsma – Numa Numa
43. George Duke – The Simple Things
44. Glen Hansard, Marketa Irglova – Falling Slowly
45. Gorillaz – DARE
46. Gregorian Chant – Deum Verum
47. Gwyneth Paltrow & Huey Lewis – Cruisin
48. Hall & Oates – I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)
49. Hall & Oates – Kiss on my List
50. Hall & Oates – One On One
51. Heavyshift – 90° in the Shade
52. Herb Alpert – Making Love in the Rain
53. Hootie & the Blowfish – Only Wanna Be With You
54. Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo'ole – Somewhere over the Rainbow
- 55. Jefferson Airplane – Somebody to Love**
56. Jefferson Airplane – White Rabbit
57. Jimmy Sommers – Lowdown
- 58. John B. Foley – Take, Lord, Receive**
- 59. Johnny Mathis – When Sunny Gets Blue**
- 60. Jon Sacada – Just Another Day**
61. K.D. Lang – Constant Craving
62. Kingston Trio – Scotch & Soda
63. Lauren Wood – Fallen
64. Leslie Odom, Jr., Lin-Manuel Miranda – Dear Theodosia
65. Linda Ronstadt – Ooo Baby Baby
- 66. Lizz Wright – Blue Rose**
- 67. Martin Smith – I Could Sing of Your Love Forever**
- 68. Marty Haugen – Psalm 23, Shepherd Me Oh God**
69. Michael Feinstein – Our Love Is Here to Stay

- 70. Michael McDonald – I Gotta Try**
- 71. Neil Young – Harvest Moon**
- 72. Nina Simone – Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood**
73. Nora Jones – Don't Know Why
74. Norman Brown – That's The Way Love Goes
75. Pentatonix – Mary Did You Know?
76. Peter White – Venice Beach
77. Phil Collins – In the Air Tonight
- 78. Player – Baby Come Back**
- 79. Ray Charles – Georgia On My Mind**
80. Rebekah Del Rio - Mulholland Drive – LLorando (Crying)
- 81. Richard Gillard & Betty Pulkingham – The Servant Song**
- 82. Santana/Rob Thomas – Smooth**
- 83. Santana/Steve Winwood by Timmy Thomas – Why Can't We Live Together**
- 84. Sarah Hart/Dwight Lilies – Go In Peace**
- 85. Sophie Ellis-Bextor – Murder On The Dancefloor**
86. Spandau Ballet – True
87. Tears For Fears – Everybody Wants To Rule The World
88. The Black Eyed Peas – I Gotta Feeling
89. The Cathedral Singers & Richard Proulx – Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
90. The Flamingos – I Only Have Eyes For You
- 91. The Fleetwoods – Come Softly to Me**
92. The Rolling Stones – Gimme Shelter
93. Toto – I won't hold you back
- 94. Tracy Chapman – Baby Can I Hold You?**
- 95. Tracy Chapman – Fast Car**
- 96. Tracy Chapman – Give Me One Reason**
- 97. Whitney Houston – I Will Always Love You**
- 98. Willie Nelson – Stardust**
- 99. Willie Nelson – Moonlight in Vermont**
100. Ylvis – The Fox (What Does The Fox Say?)
- 101. Yusuf Islam (aka Cat Stevens) – Oh, Very Young**
- 102. Yusuf Islam (aka Cat Stevens) – Where Do the Children Play?**
- 103. 10cc – Dreadlock Holiday**
- 104. 10cc – I'm Not In Love**

EPILOGUE

Oh, very young, what will you leave us this time?
You're only dancing on this earth for a short while
And though your dreams may toss and turn you now

They will vanish away like your dad's best jeans
Denim blue fading up to the sky
And though you want them to last forever
You know they never will
You know they never will
And the patches make the goodbye harder still

Oh, very young, what will you leave us this time?
There'll never be a better chance to change your mind
And if you want this world to see better days

Will you carry the words of love with you?
Will you ride the great white bird into heaven?
And though you want to last forever
You know you never will
You know you never will
And the goodbye makes the journey harder still

Oh very young, what will you leave us this time?
You're only dancin' on this earth for a short while
Oh very young, what will you leave us this time?

By Yusuf Islam (aka Cat Stevens) 1974 - Oh, Very Young

I am a grateful old man.

A proud father. [*and grandfather*]

Press on, dear boy. [*boys and girl*]

Seek truth.

Make beauty.

Live well.

I love you. my son. [*my sons and daughters-in-law, grandsons and granddaughter*]

Till heaven,

Theo of Golden [*and me, Grandpa/Dad Fraser*]

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; I was made weak,
that I might learn humbly to obey....

I asked for health, that I might do greater things; I was given
infirmity, that I might do better things....

I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty, that I
might be wise....

I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men; I was given
weakness, that I might feel the need of God....

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life, that I
might enjoy all things....

I got nothing that I asked for...but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

AMEN!

Prayer of an Unknown Confederate Soldier