

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

**GOD
IN OUR
LIVES**

Grandpa's Love

To our precious Phoebe, Amedeo and Damiano

March 2018

Dear Theodosia what to say to you...

When you came into the world you cried and it broke my heart
I'm dedicating every day to you...

When you smile, you knock me out, I fall apart and I thought I
was so smart

You will come of age with our young nation

We'll bleed and fight for you

We'll make it right for you

If we lay a strong enough foundation

We'll pass it on to you

We'll give the world to you and you'll blow us all away

Someday, someday

Yeah you'll blow us all away

Someday, someday

Oh, Phillip when you smile I am undone, my son

Look at my son

Pride is not the word I'm looking for

There is so much more inside me now

Oh, Phillip you outshine the morning sun, my son

When you smile, I fall apart and I thought I was so smart

I'll do whatever it takes

I'll make a million mistakes

I'll make the world safe and sound for you

You'll come of age with our young nation

We'll bleed and fight for you

We'll make it right for you

If we lay a strong enough foundation

We'll pass it on to you

We'll give the world to you and you'll blow us all away

Someday, someday

Yeah, you'll blow us all away

Someday, someday

From Hamilton the Musical - Dear Theodosia

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Introduction

Dear Phoebe, Amedeo and Damiano, I decided to write this book to you because I wanted to share my faith in God through the stories from the homilies I have preached as a Deacon. If there is one thing I want you to know, it is that God loves you. Sometimes you won't remember this...sometimes you won't believe this...but it is the one best thing to understand.... And all the rest is detail. The older I get, the more it comes to mind.

As you will see, I show the Scriptures from the day that I preached. The Word of God is always the context of the homily in the Mass. Know that he is always talking to us directly when we hear Scriptures or read the Bible. It took me years to understand that...and that is why I love the Scriptures.

Now some people may think that you won't read this book, but I do. Let me share a secret....I sometimes skip to the end of the book I am reading to see how it ends... you may want to do that right now, before reading anymore. Go to my last homily in this book...view the video too....it moved me and I am confident that someday it will move you as well.

See you soon my little ones.

Love, Grandpa Fraser

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.

Responsorial Psalm PS 27:1, 4, 13-14

R. (1a) The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life's refuge; of whom should I be afraid?

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

One thing I ask of the LORD; this I seek: To dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD and contemplate his temple.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD with courage; be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

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.

Today the Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much He invites us to consider the "bigger picture", His vision that can sustain and nurture us in all situations throughout His Creation. In Isaiah, the prophet reflects on the northern kingdom of Israel who suffered the anguish of invasion and separation. Their situation was dire, but God breaks the yoke of the oppressor and shines a great light on the people. In Corinthians, Paul challenges his readers to live according to the vision offered them of life in Christ Jesus, a vision that allows them to come together, dispel division and live in agreement. In the Gospel Jesus enters the daily life of his future disciples and asks them to follow him to be fishers of men. His vision will help them understand what they need to become builders of the kingdom that will change the world.

As I was thinking about God's vision this week, I couldn't help but remember my family gathering this Christmas in Asheville, NC. All 8 of us, our 2 sons and daughters-in-law, our 2 grandsons, Pat and I, we were there to greet Phoebe, our granddaughter, when she was born Dec 28. 6 lbs, 14 oz. 19 1/2" long. Did I mention she is beautiful and perfect? Well there's nothing like a newborn to get us thinking about the bigger picture of how we are fulfilling or rather not fulfilling God's vision for the His Creation. It doesn't take much thought to know that with all our abundance, we are missing the mark. But I also think we have the vision for the solution that sustains and nurtures us in all situations throughout His Creation.

Pope Francis in his recent encyclical Laudato Si: On Care For Our Common Home shows us that hopeful vision, one that will help to direct our efforts to address the crises that we face in our world today. Pope Francis addressed "every person living on this planet," calling the Church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of our Environmental and Economic and Social challenges, and to join him in embarking on a new path.

To understand why Pope Francis wrote this encyclical, Bishop Robert Barron recently explained the influence that shaped his thinking. 30 years ago in 1986, Father Jorge Mario Bergoglio was sent to Germany to begin his doctoral studies. The focus of his research was the great 20th century theologian and cultural critic Romano Guardini. Though he never finished his doctoral degree, Bergoglio's immersion in the writings of Guardini decisively shaped his thinking. I am sure you heard that much of the commentary on Pope Francis's encyclical Laudato Si has focused on the issue of global warming, and some have dismissed the encyclical

because they say the Pope supports various political views. But Bishop Barron says, these opinions miss the forest for one very particular tree: the influence of Romano Guardini and his distinctive take on modern life.

“Guardini loved to vacation in Italy, and he took particular delight in the lake region around Milan. He was enchanted, of course, by the physical beauty of the area, but what intrigued him above all was the manner in which people had interacted non-invasively and respectfully with nature. One example was how the homes along Lake Como imitated the lines and rhythms of the landscape. But by the 1920’s, he had begun to notice change all around. Homes being built were not only larger, but more “aggressive,” indifferent to the surrounding environment, no longer accommodating themselves to the natural setting.”

It is only against this background that we can properly read the Pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si*. Francis’ vision is in the far greater context of a theology of nature and Ecology of Humanity that stands apart from the typical modern point of view: He recognizes “that the earth has become piled with filth, that pollution adversely affects the health of hundreds of millions but especially the poor, that we live in a “throwaway” culture, that human life is treated with indifference, that huge populations have little access to clean drinking water, that thousands of animal species are permitted to fall into extinction, and yes even that we live in housing that bears no organic relation to the natural environment. Pope Francis wants us to recover a proper sensibility, where we are integrated into relationship with the world that surrounds us.”

What strikes the Pope as self-evident is that the nature we have attempted to dominate, for the past several centuries, has now turned against us. As he recently put it, “God always forgives; human beings sometimes forgive; but when nature is mistreated, she never forgives.”

Dear Lord, you are our light and our salvation, help us to see with your vision the solution that sustains and nurtures us in all situations throughout your Creation. Break our yokes of despair and gather us together united without division, so that we may become builders of your kingdom and better stewards of your Creation. Help us to change our world for the better starting right here at St Brendan’s, in our homes, and at work...it’s for Phoebe, and all our children. Amen.

Amedeo Rock Fraser's Baptism

December 19, 2010

Gospel, Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."



Nothing on this earth can really compare with the birth of a child. I was there at both Christopher's and Matthew's births. After all the preparation I did with Pat, you couldn't have kept me out of there. And I was awed by the whole experience. We come to realize that each of our children possesses a potential – and a value – which cannot be calculated. We are created in the very image of God. That we can participate in the conception of a human being should amaze us, yet there is another birth that happens in our Christian lives that most of us don't take seriously enough.

In the Gospel, Jesus risked misunderstanding by allowing John to baptize him. It made him appear to somehow needing spiritual cleansing. That wasn't true, as John himself testified. But the fact that Jesus would accept such a risk shows how important He considered Baptism. It would become not only a vehicle of conversion, but of rebirth. As St. Augustine pointed out, Jesus was baptized not for his sake, but for ours. The waters did not transform Him; He transformed the waters.

As I have said many times before, I love the Sacrament of Baptism. At Baptisms I see people gather their children, family and friends as believers in God for a joyous celebration. Most people really don't put much effort into it and yet we know that Baptism is an important Sacrament that we must do. I love to remind people that we may not realize it, but we come to Baptisms as Apostles of Christ because someone changed our lives by having us baptized, and so we carry on the great commission that Jesus commanded us to do 2000 years ago. Our faith is born out of events of history, things that really happened -- a man about thirty years old, kneeling in the water of a river was baptized by St. John. This happened so that people of all times and places might be baptized into His life, and yes, into His suffering and death....so that we might then be resurrected with Him to new life. Our children are precious in our eyes. And wanting the very best for our children, we baptize them and give them the indelible spiritual mark of belonging to Jesus. As Amedeo is held over the font, I will bend down looking into his eyes, slowly pouring the water over his little head three times while saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." If we only had eyes to see, we would be astounded by the rolling back of the curtains of time and space, and would behold the most sorrowful and tragic figure of Christ dying on a cross and then a bright, unearthly light breaking out of an empty tomb. All that is done and accomplished in this glorious Sacrament. All of it is poured forth from this transformed water flowing

over our heads and it floods our souls with the Holy Spirit. That is Baptism. I have to ask you. Aren't you glad you were baptized?

All God's Blessings, Grandpa Fraser

The Rest of the Story:

The night before the Baptism as we were talking after dinner, Sonia's mother mentioned that she had never been baptized. In 1970 as a brave and adventurous 23-year-old Japanese young woman, she had emigrated to Italy. Tsuji Mitsuyo (who we call Mimi) within 5 years was married and had a baby daughter. Mimi said she has been thinking about being baptized and becoming a Catholic for decades. Now that she and her husband live in Dalian, China, a city that has no Catholic Churches, she regrets she wasn't baptized. Needless to say I was blown away...I told Mimi that if she wanted to be baptized, somehow we would get it done. The next day with the Pastor's approval, I baptized 7-month Amedeo and his 66-year-old grandma Mimi.

On Monday when we went to register Mimi's baptism, the Pastor was called to verify his approval. The priest I had spoken to was not the Pastor after all! OOPs! He mentioned something about checking with the Canon lawyers, but I assured Mimi that her baptism wouldn't wash off. My Pastor in Cumming said I should have Confirmed her as well, which relieved my concerns that I did something wrong. Years later I discovered that I did not have facilities to baptize adults. But, you know what, we prayed that somehow we would get it done, and I believe that with God's help it was done!!

During my homily that day I also answered Pat Harrell the Godfather who had asked what he should do to be a good Godfather? I told him and the Godmother that they had a perfect start because Sonia and Chistopher chose them because they recognized extraordinary love in their lives...never forget that love is from God. Over the years whenever they have a chance, they needed to tell Amedeo how much God loves him. I also asked them to write a letter about what Amedeo's Baptism meant to them. Then, I said, in 25 or 30 years when Amedeo was baptizing his first baby, give those letters to him. Oh, and tell him that one way or another Grandpa Fraser would be there...because I love Baptisms!

Cycle A 2nd Sunday of Lent

Reading 1, Gn 12:1-4a

The LORD said to Abram: “Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.” Abram went as the LORD directed him.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. (22) Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right;

of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness,

To deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Our soul waits for the LORD, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Reading II, 2 Tm 1:8b-10

Beloved: Bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design

and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began, but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus, who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Gospel, Mt 17:1-9

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, "Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Have you ever experienced something that was right before your eyes, but it took something or someone to bring it in focus for you? I recently had such an experience in San Francisco at Christmas when I baptized my 1st grandchild, Damiano. After the Baptism, one of my Son's friends came out of the church gift shop with a cross of St. Damiano to give my grandson. It was the cross that St Francis was praying before when God called him to rebuild the chapel of San Damiano, and prompted him to give up his inheritance and devote his life to God. I immediately recognized it...it struck me that I saw that cross nearly every Sunday for the last 5 or 6 years. You see, it is the cross that Father Bob Cushing gave St Brendans and it hangs on the back wall of our sanctuary. I didn't think I ever heard the name Damiano until my grandson was born, but I had to smile to recognize that Damiano had been with me for years...right before my eyes....and, that I now have a powerful and holy reminder of my Damiano. Trust me, there are no coincidences, only God's blessings.

The reality of the Scriptures this Sunday is that God loves us so much that he blesses our lives in countless ways, not because we deserve or have earned it, but because His grace is without bounds. All we have to do is be open to receive His blessing....when we do, we enter into a new beginning.

As I was reflecting on the readings today, I couldn't help but think that the Gospel mirrors what our Lenten journey should be. The disciples Peter, James & John knew Jesus, but couldn't fully grasp who He really was. Sometimes I think we find ourselves in that situation. We know Jesus in our intellect, but we need an experience of what I call Jesus-in-the-moment to better understand Him in our hearts. We need Lenten experiences to open us up and refresh our faith so we can more fully grasp who Jesus really is.

Leading up to today's Gospel, Matthew had taken 16 chapters to narrate how Jesus gradually taught the Disciples about Himself. In Chapter 16, Jesus had inched them along until Peter was able to say, under pressure, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" They finally got it! Jesus then felt safe to tell them for the very first time that "He must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised." If you remember, Peter vehemently objected. He took Jesus aside "and began to rebuke him, God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." He didn't get it. Jesus had to set him straight, but He didn't stop blessing Peter. In Chapter 17, the Transfiguration was a way for Jesus to show that his

sacrifice would not contradict his divinity. It was a powerful way to open the Disciples hearts to know who He really was.

While we probably won't have an experience like Peter, James and John did, nevertheless we can have some powerful experiences in our own Lenten journeys that will open our hearts. We need to have some Jesus-in-the-moment experiences to take us out of our spiritual comfort zone. It could be as simple as discussing a Lenten reflections booklet and sharing our faith among our family around the dinner table. Or, joining the Men's Group or the ladies at Voyagers on Friday mornings, or at the Parish retreat, to share faith among friends. Telling a friend in need that we will dedicate our prayers to them this week. Going to Reconciliation. Like the Disciples who came to understand when they saw the Transfigured Jesus, in Lent our faith needs to be stirred, and maybe even shaken, so we can recognize that the Risen Christ is all around us.

Lent is a time to listen to Jesus and enter a new beginning. He destroyed death, and brought life and immortality... He calls us to repentance and a change of heart. It is a time to act on God's Word about loving our enemies and being peacemakers.... to walk into Church recognizing the people here are the Body of Christ....to eagerly listen to the Word made flesh "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.".....to approach in awe as we come to receive the Holy Eucharist...and, to leave here better understanding that He has saved us and has called us to a holy life.

Lent is a time to recognize that God's abundant blessing in our lives are right before our eyes inviting us to enter into a new beginning. May we come to fully appreciate that the ultimate blessing of God is Jesus Himself.

Cycle B 3rd Sunday of Advent

Reading 1, Is 61:1-2a, 10-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God. I rejoice heartily in the LORD, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels. As the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord GOD make justice and praise spring up before all the nations.

Responsorial Psalm, Lk 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54.

R. (Is 61:10b) My soul rejoices in my God.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed:

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation.

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

R. My soul rejoices in my God.

Reading II, 1 Thes 5:16-24

Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

Gospel, Jn 1:6-8, 19-28

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. And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, "Who are you?" He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, "I am not the Christ." So they asked him, "What are you then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?" He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'" as Isaiah the prophet said." Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie." This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

“Brothers and sisters: Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil.”

The first two Sundays of Advent focused our attention on the end times, death, judgement and our destiny. The 3rd Sunday of Advent focuses us on the Lord already among us, which is cause for celebration.

In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist cleared the path for the coming of the anointed one. But, since Jesus’ death and resurrection it has been through our lives, the lives of believers empowered with the Holy Spirit, that has been the pathway through which Jesus has entered the world. That’s why Advent is the perfect time to ask, “God what kind of person do you want me to be?” It is not always easy for us to hear God’s answer. But it is a question that we Catholics are expected to ask anyway, throughout our lives.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that “Deep within our conscience we discover a law which we have not laid upon ourselves, but which we must obey. Its voice sounds in our heart at the right moment, ever calling us to love, and to do what is good and to avoid evil. . . 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.” In this never-ending search, everyone young and old, must undertake for themselves to find out what is right and what is wrong...this 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 bring everyone the promised gifts of justice, glad tidings, healing, liberty and God’s peace...and only hearts open to His promise can receive the gifts. We must respond with praise and gratitude every day of our lives. It is not easy, and does not always feel comfortable ...but it is the kind of person He wants us to be.

I remember thinking about the verse “In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” when my mother died 35 years ago after suffering for 2 years with cancer. I recall praying, “God how can I thank you for my mother dying?” Questions are good ways to pray because we have to listen for the answer. The answers came in the years after this. I came to learn that I should thank God for my father caring for my mother. After they found out she had cancer, he never went back to work so he could stay home to care for her. Before that I loved my Dad, but I didn’t like him....after that, I forgave him and we had a great relationship for 20 more years. I also learned that maybe I felt a bit of the pain of loss that Mary must have experienced when her son Jesus died on the cross. And, maybe I had some of her enormous faith that His life didn’t end, and neither did my mother’s. Finally, I thank God that because of this experience He was preparing me to be a better Deacon who would understand how important it is to support people in their time of grief.

As we form our consciences we choose to be close to God, and He promises His salvation. Today during Advent we can taste that promise if we respond to His call with an attitude of conversion....if we awaken to His presence in the Scriptures and the Holy Eucharist....if we recognize His presence in ourselves and in others. In other words, if we let Him, Jesus will teach us what kind of person He wants us to be.

Brothers and sisters: *“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil”.*

Cycle A Fourth Sunday of Advent

Reading 1 IS 7:10-14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God; let it be deep as the netherworld, or high as the sky! But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt the LORD!"

Then Isaiah said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary people, must you also weary my God? Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.

Responsorial Psalm PS 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

R. (7c and 10b) Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

The LORD's are the earth and its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it. For he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

Who can ascend the mountain of the LORD? or who may stand in his holy place? One whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, who desires not what is vain.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks for him, that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

R. Let the Lord enter; he is king of glory.

Reading 2 ROM 1:1-7

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised previously through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, the gospel about his Son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we have received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles, among whom are you also, who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gospel MT 1:18-24

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce

her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

"...he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home."

Several years ago I was speaking with a friend about our grandchildren. He mentioned something about he felt the kids really weren't his grandchildren because his boy was adopted. Well I was more than a little shocked knowing what a great father he was. I asked him, "What would have happened if Joseph had not accepted Jesus as his son?" He said, "You know Roger, you are right." From that day, he had a new attitude and outlook on his son...and his grandchildren. You know sometimes the Holy Spirit really prompts us to say the right thing at the right time.

We don't talk much about Joseph, but whenever I hear these scriptures, I wonder what he must have been thinking when the angel told him about how Mary became pregnant in literal and realistic terms. *"...do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her."* Here was this man engaged to a woman he loved who was going to bear a child that was not his own "flesh and blood." And everything was already worked out: the child will be a boy and have the name of Jesus. It's one thing to know the ancient scriptures and believe that such an event would occur. It is quite another to accept it and take joy that it is happening right now. How could it be good news for Joseph when the angel appeared and told him Isaiah's "virgin with child" was Mary? Could he be thrilled that Mary would give birth to a baby boy the Prophets called Immanuel, "God with us"? I am sure he was thinking, "Well sign me up."

St. Joseph has been my Patron Saint since I became Catholic over 50 years ago. I marvel at Joseph, our model of the unwavering husband and father, faith-filled provider, and trusting protector. While it was clear that Joseph accepted being an adoptive father, things never came easy. In fact, just about everything that could go wrong, went wrong. Instead of security and comfort, Mary and Joseph found themselves facing a treacherous journey during the last stage of her pregnancy. I can't imagine the stress they endured when there was no suitable place to stay, and no family or friends around. We know the earliest days were full of fear and flight. And, the first ceremony in the temple would be marred by the ominous prediction of an old seer that his son would be rejected and his wife would have her very soul pierced. After the early years of migration and displacement, even when the family finally settled down, there was more trouble. His obviously well-educated and self-confident son would

be misplaced in Jerusalem and, after a three-day search, Jesus showed up reminding them that he had another “Father” who made a greater claim on him.

Over the years it could not have been easy for Joseph to trust God. Yet despite all the hardship and maybe even doubt, Joseph, the adoptive father, the humble husband, the good provider, the enduring protector, he knew that God loved him and his family. He drew upon that love as a husband and father as he sacrificed while caring for his wife and son. It took great love and great faith for Joseph to fully accept both Mary and Jesus as his family...but I also have to believe that he finally realized he was truly blessed because of who they were...He must have been awed knowing that he was chosen by God to be the husband of the Mother of God, and earthly father to the promised Savior of mankind.

And so, on this 4th Sunday of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, let us invite St. Joseph, trusting husband and father, to pray for us and help us in our struggles as spouses and parents and Christians, so we may never waver from our trust in God’s love.

St. Joseph, pray for us. Amen.

Cycle B 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 JON 3:1-5, 10

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, saying: "Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and announce to it the message that I will tell you." So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD'S bidding. Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began his journey through the city, and had gone but a single day's walk announcing, "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed, " when the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth. When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil way, he repented of the evil that he had threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out.

Responsorial Psalm PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (4a) Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths, Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD, and your love are from of old. In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O LORD.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Good and upright is the LORD; thus he shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice and teaches the humble his way.

R. Teach me your ways, O Lord.

Reading 11 1 COR 7:29-31

I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away.

Gospel MK 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." As he passed by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee,

and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Every day we hear someone mention what is right and what is wrong with the world. Unfortunately, we mostly hear what is wrong, too often about how awful things are. It is difficult to have an optimistic vision, to see ways we have of making our world a better place in which to live...it is hard to have a vision of what we can do that is positive, rather than being overwhelmed and made anxious by the news.

Jesus also lived in a troubled world, a world that was in many aspects in worse shape than the one in which we live today. Justice was a joke in Jesus' time; Roman legions oppressed people without mercy, while the Romans themselves lived in a great lie rejecting God.

Into all of this God sent Jesus Christ to help mankind have the light of optimistic vision, to give us the faith, the hope, the love...and, the courage to make our world become everything God dreamed it could be when He created it in the first place. Jesus is resolved to accomplish this purpose one life at a time. And He will not be denied. His cousin was arrested, and soon they would be coming after Him...but He wasn't sad or angry, rather He was optimistic proclaiming the Gospel, the Good News.

Did you see the January 15, 2018 issue of TIME magazine? The cover special report headline was "The Optimists." I recommend you get a copy and read the 17 uplifting articles. The Editor said: "Reading the news today does not exactly leave you feeling optimistic. Hurricanes in the Americas. Horrific mass shootings. Global tensions over nuclear arms. Bloody civil wars in Syria and Yemen. Your heart breaks for every person who is touched by these tragedies. Even for those of us lucky enough not to be directly affected, it may feel like the world is falling apart. But these events—as awful as they are—have happened in the context of a bigger, positive trend. [You see,] on the whole, the world is getting better.

This is not some naively optimistic view; it's backed by data. Look at the number of children who die before their fifth birthday. Since 1990, that figure has been cut in half. That means 122 million children have been saved in [27 years], and countless families have been spared the heartbreak of losing a child.

And that's just one measure. In 1990, more than a third of the global population lived in extreme poverty; today only about [1 in 10] do. Women are gaining political power and now make up more than [20%] of national parliaments...and the world is finally starting to listen when women speak up about [harassment and abuse.] More than 90% of all children in the world attend primary school. In the U.S., you are far less likely to die on the job or in a car than your grandparents were. [I could go on.]

I'm not trying to downplay the work that remains. Being an optimist doesn't mean you ignore tragedy and injustice. It means you're inspired to look for people making progress on those fronts, and to help spread that progress more widely. If [we are] shocked by the idea of millions of children dying, [we]ask: Who is good at saving kids, and how can we help them do more?"

From today's Gospel we know that the mission of Christ was to make us responsible, and to make us take responsibility for ourselves first...to make something good and decent out of our own lives....with our families, our children, our grandchildren, our brothers and sisters, our nieces and nephews...with our friends...with our neighbors. Life is God's gift to us. So what we do with it is our gift to God. It is also our gift to those around us.

The Good News is that we are members of a very vibrant and optimistic Catholic Church that is changing the world: the world's Catholic population has doubled in the last 30 years to 1.3 billion, and is expanding by 12.5 million baptisms annually. Vatican Radio broadcasts in 47 languages. The Holy See has a permanent presence in some 40 international organizations such as the United Nations and the Arab League. 193 countries enjoy diplomatic ties to the Vatican. We are leaders advocating the many ways to respect and support the sanctity of all life, from conception to natural death. Even in countries with only small Catholic minorities, the church wields considerable clout as the world's largest nongovernmental provider of education and health care, and we are a major donor of emergency aid.

Jesus cries out to us and tells us that a better world is within our reach; it's within our grasp. Someone said, "Taking life by the yard is hard, but life taken by the inch is a cinch. If you see something, do something!" We must respond to life as it is, in the moment, one day at a time. That is the only way to deal with reality.

The call of Jesus we just heard in today's Gospel is not a call issued simply to twelve Jewish men 2,000 years ago. It is an insistent call, and urgent call, a demanding call...to you and me here and now, today, we who have been called by God to receive the Bread of Life from this altar and then to leave this church on a mission. We are to leave here as those who are sent, sent with the Twelve Apostles to change the world.

You see the simple truth is that St. Brendan's has been changing the world around us for the last 17 years....and, the 4000 families and 10,000 men, women and children registered here, we are learning to embrace Christ's optimistic vision, we are being inspired to change the world every day, with everyone we meet!! God Bless You!

Now, that's Good News!

Cycle A 4th Sunday of Lent

Reading I, 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a

The LORD said to Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen my king from among his sons." As Jesse and his sons came to the sacrifice, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is here before him." But the LORD said to Samuel: "Do not judge from his appearance or from his lofty stature, because I have rejected him. Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart." In the same way Jesse presented seven sons before Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any one of these." Then Samuel asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, who is tending the sheep." Samuel said to Jesse, "Send for him; we will not begin the sacrificial banquet until he arrives here." Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The LORD said, "There--anoint him, for this is the one!" Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed David in the presence of his brothers; and from that day on, the spirit of the LORD rushed upon David.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side With your rod and your staff that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II, Eph 5:8-14

Brothers and sisters: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that

becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Gospel, Jn 9:1-41 or 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38

As Jesus passed by he saw a man blind from birth. He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam"--which means Sent--. So he went and washed, and came back able to see. His neighbors and those who had seen him earlier as a beggar said, "Isn't this the one who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is," but others said, "No, he just looks like him." He said, "I am." They brought the one who was once blind to the Pharisees. Now Jesus had made clay and opened his eyes on a Sabbath. So then the Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see." So some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a sinful man do such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you have to say about him, since he opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." They answered and said to him, "You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they threw him out. When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered and said, "Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "I do believe, Lord," and he worshiped him.

A few years ago before I saw the movie the Passion of the Christ, I was reading an article about it and a few words jumped out at me: "Simon came off as a small hero." For some reason I was intrigued; what could make Simon stand out? I went to the Gospels and saw that he was barely mentioned. When I finally saw the movie, I paid particular attention to Simon...I have to say that I was fascinated with the way he was portrayed. Simon came upon the procession of Jesus struggling with the cross, holding the hand of his child...it was obvious he knew nothing about what was happening. A soldier picked him out at random commanding him to come over. Simon's protests were useless as the soldier threatened him, demanding he immediately come over to carry the cross. Bewildered, Simon took the weight of the cross on his shoulders. Jesus didn't go before him or walk behind him. Rather He hooked his arm over the cross and stumbled along, side-by-side, looking right into Simon's eyes. At first Simon was totally in shock not knowing why or what he had been forced into ...we can imagine what was going through his mind: what could this man have done to be carrying a cross to be crucified? Who could this man be? How did I ever get into this mess? As the short journey transpired, and though no words were spoken, he sensed something special about Jesus. Simon carried the cross and he stepped up to defend the helpless, cruelly beaten Jesus...Simon became a small hero. At Calvary, Simon hesitated leaving...it was as if he were torn between staying with this man Jesus he had come to know and returning to his family. I am struck by how similar it can be in our own lives. We are minding our own business and BOOM, something urgent or critical over takes us...we can be easily swept up in a crisis forced to carry a cross. In these times do we respond in faith trusting that Jesus is with us...eye-to-eye so to speak, like he was with Simon? Sooner or later we come to realize something special is happening in our lives...we are not alone...Jesus is with us. Jesus never said life would be easy...but he did say He would be with us always.

Today we see...we see that God loves us so much that He brings us out of the darkness of sin into the light of faith. And many times we find that faith in the most challenging and unlikely places.

The scriptures today are filled with contrasting images of our faith--darkness and light--man and God--blindness and sight. God sees differently than we do and His choices are not to be questioned no matter how unlikely they seem. From the first reading today, a most unlikely young shepherd boy, not seen as worthy by his family, was called from the cold and lonely field to be anointed as king no less and to be possessed by the spirit of the Lord. He was David, the prophesized head of the lineage that ended in Jesus Christ Himself.

In the Gospel we heard about a pitiful beggar, blind from birth, who was touched by Jesus. His new sight was not just in his eyes, rather he saw from his heart and developed a faith in God through a series of trials ending in being banished from the synagogue. Rejected, Jesus found him and raised his belief to the ultimate clarity of vision: faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Tragically, the self-righteous Pharisees who were supposed to know the Christ when he came, failed to recognize their own blindness when He did appear.

We know that the road of life can be rough and the gate to heaven is narrow. We must hold onto our faith that is nurtured in the Word and in the Eucharist here today; there is one God, one Lord and one Baptism for all. Let us pray that God will use us to bless the people around the world ravaged by the horrific trials of poverty and war, of illness and injury. And if you are enduring some unspoken suffering, think about the blind man and Simon....have faith to see...see that God is with you as well.

Cycle A 5th Sunday of Lent

Reading 1, 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.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

R. (7) With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

If you, O LORD, mark iniquities, LORD, who can stand? But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

I trust in the LORD; my soul trusts in his word. More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the LORD.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

For with the LORD is kindness and with him is plenteous redemption; And he will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

R. With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption.

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.

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? The reality of today's Scriptures is 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?

I loaned a friend my DVD The Passion of the Christ. I love that movie because for me it makes the Scriptures come alive, and calls us to read and re-read all of the Gospels of the Good Friday journey of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Two days later the friend returned the movie saying they couldn't finish it...the scenes of beating Jesus were too gruesome...they couldn't bare to watch Jesus tormented and struggling under the cross. I understand. And yet, I think this film is the perfect Lenten movie for the very reason we should confront the horrendous suffering and crucifixion death that Jesus endured in order to fully grasp what the resurrection really means.

There are few things in our lives that will challenge and overwhelm our faith like death does. The Scriptures today are full of death and yet this is by no means the morbid theme we come away with. Intellectually we know death is the fate of all humans, yet when it strikes, it can crush us with sadness. It was no different for Jesus. When confronted with death even Jesus became disturbed and deeply troubled. "And Jesus wept." This is a picture of Jesus we do not ordinarily see. He knew what was coming in the days ahead.

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 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 celebration on Palm Sunday and the condemnation that lead 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 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 believe that He is the resurrection and the life. These readings are given to us today so that we will make a choice...will we choose death, or resurrection and life? Will we reconcile suffering and death with peace and eternal life? Will we choose Christ?

On this day of RCIA's 3rd Scrutiny 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 and Apostles; with our veterans taken in the prime of their lives; with the babies aborted before they could live; and with our loved ones who are gone, but not forgotten....with all of these people who we pray for daily...if we live and die in that belief, nothing of their goodness and grace will be lost and forgotten in a grave somewhere.

God promised and then He did it. Will we choose death, or resurrection and life? Will we choose Christ? When our faith in Jesus is 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. Our God-given faith allows us to participate in life with a very much alive, Risen Christ. Now, at this moment, His kingdom exists...and will forever more. We who believe in Jesus walk in His light. We will never die.

Cycle B 5th Sunday of Lent

Reading 1 JER 31:31-34

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel

and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives how to know the LORD. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

Responsorial Psalm PS 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

R. (12a) Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.

I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners shall return to you.

R. Create a clean heart in me, O God.

Reading 2 HEB 5:7-9

In the days when Christ Jesus was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Gospel JN 12:20-33

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of

wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again." The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder; but others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come for my sake but for yours. Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

“Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

Here is the cry of humanity throughout the ages and even today. Consciously or, more likely, unconsciously we call out....seeking Jesus. During our Lenten penance and renewal, do we recognize the blessings we have as Catholic Christians? Surrounded by a rich tradition of prayer, art and music, many symbols and sacraments that guide us, remind us, and grace us with the real presence of the Risen Christ. Energized by the Word and by partaking in the Holy Eucharist, we then are better prepared to step out into the world to serve, and be His hands and feet, carrying His love and message of salvation to everyone we encounter. If we open our hearts to Him and earnestly pray, God loves us so much that He will reveal Himself to us as He answers our call: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

A few weeks ago my wife and I were returning from an out-of-state trip. she turned to me and asked, “what are you thinking?” I replied, “I need to go to church.” We had been to Mass that morning, but it was not that unusual because I was scheduled to serve at the 5PM Sunday evening. After a full weekend, I was also tired, but the thought kept at me, “I need to go to church.” Well I did go, and as I parked in front of church, a friend came out to the car to meet me. “Deacon Roger, can you help? A man is inside saying that his neighbor just died and someone needs to go to pray with his wife.” Well of course I could. So I grabbed the Book of Blessings, and off we went knowing Father Patrick was coming later. As I pulled up and got out, I met two policemen and the County Coroner... they couldn’t have been more nice or compassionate as they explained that the man Al had died less than 2 hours ago and Kathy his wife was all alone with no living relatives. I went in to meet Kathy and a neighbor was sitting with her. We talked, and prayed, about Al who was 72, a former MD and now worked analyzing tissue and chemical samples for various government agencies. But then she explained their life’s work: for the last 20 years they had created film documentaries. First were films about the bears in the Great Smoky Mountains, but most recently about the families and the people who were displaced from Cades Cove when the National Park was created. The living room wall was filled with about 25 award plaques, but she was most proud of the many people who they got to know and who became dear friends as they learned their life stories. Al and Kathy were only half way through creating a 6-part series. And she was now worried that it would not be finished.

Let me explain how our loving and merciful God works in our lives so we can understand the reading *“where I am, there also will my servant be”* and how we can “see Jesus”. That day He prompted me to “go to church” though I was focused on my own life, but He also sent many others to help: one a parishioner, who did not just call St. Brendans,

he came here to get someone. Another neighbor who only knew Kathy “at the mailbox”, came to sit with her. Compassionate police, Coroner and funeral home staff. A Deacon and a Priest...and a week later, many friends from Tennessee to share the grief of a woman who has no living relatives. And by the way, there also is a neighbor who works editing documentary films for CNN... Now if you think this is all just a coincidence, believe me you don’t understand!

We are surrounded by the presence of Jesus and signs to remind us. As the Catechism 789 and 790 says: “Not only is [the Church] gathered around Him; she is united in Him, in His body.” “Believers who respond to God’s word and become members of Christ’s body, become intimately united with Him.”

As Jesus prayed in today’s Gospel and God heard because of His reverence, so must we encounter Jesus through prayer. We will come to know Him, and He us, as He becomes a constant companion in our lives. And as Jesus did, we must Glorify God....Glorify God with our lives! Know that His Holy Spirit is with us in good times and bad...be comforted...be humbled. We must call out consciously many times a day: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus”

But we cannot stop there focused inwardly. We must work to foster everyone’s response to God’s call...from the casual inquiry to the spiritual development of a catechumen. Are we an instrument of Jesus to others who say “Sir, we would like to see Jesus?” What can we do better? Instead of judging others, non-Catholics or sleeping Catholics, how can we respond to their needs and awaken them to see Jesus? How can we spread a passion for Christ?

When you and I see Jesus this week, will we be ready to respond to others calling “*Sir, we would like to see Jesus*”?

Cycle A 2nd Sunday of Easter

Divine Mercy Sunday

Reading 1, Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24

R. (1) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. Let the house of Israel say, "His mercy endures forever." Let the house of Aaron say, "His mercy endures forever." Let those who fear the LORD say, "His mercy endures forever."

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. I was hard pressed and was falling, but the LORD helped me. My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior. The joyful shout of victory in the tents of the just:

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. By the LORD has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

Reading II, 1 Pt 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Grandpa's Stories at St. Brendan GOD IN OUR LIVES Grandpa's Love 47

Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

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.

3 weeks ago today I was in Haiti with Father Rafael and 4 of our fellow parishioners visiting the people of Notre Dame de Fatima in Bassin-Zim. Today I am sharing a few stories of our trip so that we may understand the words of the 2nd reading, *"Although you have not seen Him you love Him; even though you do not see Him now yet believe in Him, you rejoice in an indescribable and glorious joy as you attain the goal of your faith...."* You see, we met the Risen Jesus in Haiti, and it was a humbling and joyous experience. It may sound strange to find joy in the midst of poverty and suffering. But the joy is not in the suffering....it is in the promise of God's blessings. There is joy in Haiti.

You may ask, "Why did you ever go to a God-forsaken place like Haiti?" The quick answer is, "to visit our sister parish Notre Dame de Fatima." But, on this the 2nd Sunday of Easter, which is also known as Divine Mercy Sunday, we hear in the Gospel that Jesus told His disciples, *"Peace be with you. As the Father sent me so I send you...Receive the Holy Spirit."* We took that to heart, we went and now we better appreciate what "dirt poor" means....dusty and dirty poor. We discovered that our trip to Haiti was a Lenten retreat of sacrifice, and, a profound experience of God's love and mercy. We met angels in Haiti...We saw where you go to learn to be a saint...Our faith was tested...We praised God with the vibrant, loving and hardworking people of Notre Dame de Fatima...and, I heard God's voice saying that he loves us more...much more than we imagine.

I asked, "Do they know they are poor?" "Yes," I was told, "because they can't feed their families." Inflation is high and food prices are higher. But, we at St Brendan are making a difference in Bassin-Zim, with the resources we are sharing, especially the micro-loans. Did you know that we just bought a generator for the church compound? More than that, with your help we will build a parish hall and then dedicate it 14 months from now on the Feast of St. Brenden, May 16, 2009. And, maybe...eventually...Father Meres will get his dream of a Catholic school. There is hope in Haiti.

We met angels in Haiti that took care of us every step of the way...Bernard, a true Haitian renaissance man, Father Meres, our interpreters Bastia & Berry, our cooks, Memem and Nanush, to name a few. These angels kept us safe in a place where I don't know how people survive. Common place things for us in the United States, like drinking water or taking a taxi ride, in Haiti are missteps that can have dire consequences.

When we arrived in Bassin-Zim, Mass had already started. We heard a glorious sound of singing from the open-air sanctuary. Father Meres told us to quickly vest, and he pushed Father Rafi and I out onto the Altar. Suddenly, we were in front of over 600 people. They were raising the roof with a truly joyful noise. What a grand and glorious introduction to the people of Notre Dame de Fatima. Later our teens who came on the trip, Desiree Simon and Kat Cretes, were introduced so they could begin bridging the divide between our communities. After Mass I met another teen, Ellivens. I asked, "What do you want to tell the people of St. Brenden's?" He answered, "I love to speak English, but I am a student who has no books." I challenge the youth of our two communities to begin communicating, but also find a way to share the amazing music we heard in Haiti and to select the books for Ellivens and his friends to practice their English.

We went to the nutrition clinic that Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity run caring for over 100 children at a time. It is the place where we can go to see God's mercy and to learn to be a saint. I saw someone scoop-up into their arms a youngster no more than 2 years old...and then be told to put him down because he may have the contagious scabies itch mites. Others in our group fed the babies laying in their little cribs...some listless and puffed up from malnutrition...one with his head swollen from hydroencephalitis whimpering in his crib....but, most of the 30 or so babies 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.

Another day, as we were waiting to meet the people that have the micro-loans, we jumped in to help the mason and his crew to move rocks from the front of the church about 100 yards to the back of the property to build the foundation of the hut for the generator. Soon more people began helping and then there were over 20 of us hauling rocks...just talking and laughing and working... there is a real sense of community at Notre Dame de Fatima. "Father Meres, "I asked, "Isn't the generator hut very close to the voodoo priest's house? Won't the noise bother him?" "Yes," he smiled, "I think he will probably move within a month" " We may be helping things along," I said, "Kevin, Father Rafi and I snore like banshees. We are making a lot of noise every night." Although, I have to tell you that since coming back my wife says I have not been snoring. Maybe that voodoo priest knows something😊

Most of us, I think, are like Thomas in today's Gospel, searching for proof of the resurrection. We are told to live by faith. But, I am

learning that when we live by faith, we discover tangible proof. This proof is in our Christian communities... like St Brendan's and Notre Dame de Fatima. We find many people sharing their possessions and involved in ministries of God's love and mercy. These are the tangible proofs that Jesus is alive among us. It wasn't easy for Thomas to understand the words of others and it isn't easy for us. So I want to take 4 of you to Haiti within the next 12 months, so you too will come to understand why we have to go to Haiti.

I have many more stories I want to tell you, but for today I have just one more. Someone recently told me that it is easy to love, but much more difficult to be loved. It is a control thing I think. It is easy for us to say to the people of Haiti, "I Love You" and send them a nice check. It wasn't so easy, I found, to be in Haiti in the least likely place, and hear God's voice very clearly saying that he loves us all. Dear God, I thought, I know you love me, but do you love these people of Haiti? We were walking down the dusty main road in Bassin-Zim when I heard voices crying out from a yard close by, "I Love You, I Love You, I Love You." I couldn't believe my ears. This is a place where people don't speak English. "I Love You," Father Rafi and I called back, "I Love You." Nine smiling children appeared at the fence...a typical Haitian fence of cactus woven with barbed wire...I want to show you their picture. "I Love You," we heard again, so I responded, "I Love You Too." The reply came, "I Love You More."

Cycle B 3rd Sunday of Easter

Reading 1, Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Peter said to the people: “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence when he had decided to release him. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses. Now I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did; but God has thus brought to fulfillment what he had announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer. Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.”

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9

R. (7a) Lord, let your face shine on us.

When I call, answer me, O my just God, you who relieve me when I am in distress; have pity on me, and hear my prayer!

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

Know that the LORD does wonders for his faithful one; the LORD will hear me when I call upon him.

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

O LORD, let the light of your countenance shine upon us! You put gladness into my heart.

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

As soon as I lie down, I fall peacefully asleep, for you alone, O LORD, bring security to my dwelling.

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

Reading II, 1 Jn 2:1-5a

My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world. The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Those who say, I know him, but do not keep his commandments are liars, and the truth is not in them. But whoever keeps his word, the love of God is truly perfected in him.

Gospel, Lk 24:35-48

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.

He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

[9AM & 11AM; I would like to begin my homily by talking with our First Communicants. Children, on this special occasion I want to tell you how St. Augustine helps us understand the mystery of the Eucharist. He often told people about a very special quality of the Holy Eucharistic. You see, the ordinary food we eat, he said, becomes part of us. I am sure you have heard the saying, “you are what you eat.” That’s why healthy foods are so important for us. But the Eucharist, St. Augustine said, is different. It is unique because when we receive the Body of Christ, we become part of Him. We become more Christ-like, more patient and kind, more forgiving and understanding. We still live our ordinary daily lives, but now it is Christ who inspires our attitudes and actions. We begin to see people and events through His eyes...to think like He does. When Jesus was on the earth, He used his own human hands to reach out to bless people. But today when He wants to help people in need, He uses our hands. During the consecration, Jesus says to us “This is my body, given up for you.” Maybe our best response is for us to say, “And this Lord is my body that I give up for you.” Together we are the Body of Christ, the Church, the presence of Jesus in the world...His hands and feet and heart. The Gospel today told us we are witnesses that He is real. When we follow Him, when we receive the Holy Eucharist, He will lead us to love and help each other. It’s what we Christians do.]

In St. Luke’s Gospel today, we find two disciples returning from their journey to Emmaus where they discovered “...how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread.” And suddenly, Jesus appeared again, which initially terrified them. They didn’t yet understand. So Jesus dispelled their fears and doubts by telling them to touch Him and by eating with them...things that can be done only by a living human being. He was not a ghost. He was truly the risen Christ living and present among them.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures so they could believe. And he said to them, “...You are witnesses of these things.”

Well we too, are witnesses of these things. The commissioning by Jesus to His disciples, His sending them out as apostles into the world, applies to you and me just as much as it applied to them. We too, are Christ’s followers, His disciples. Since our Baptism and Confirmation we too, are empowered by the Holy Spirit as apostles who are sent. We truly are missionaries of God’s kingdom...we share our faith... people learn when we witness our faith...and then the world changes!

Maybe first we need to understand that Jesus left us the important task of participating in God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Children I am not just talking to the adults, I am speaking to you too. Jesus taught us to pray: "...thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I fear that too often we think of coming to church and celebrating Mass only in terms of saving our own souls and getting to heaven. That's far too self-centered if it stops there. I think it misses the point. We need to remember that God loves us so much that we don't justify ourselves, He does. We don't sanctify ourselves, God does. We don't save ourselves, Jesus does. Being a Catholic is not about me, rather it's about others...and, it's about the risen Christ in our lives.

A few years ago I was on my way to a New Evangelization class that I am taking as part of my ongoing education as a Deacon. About 100 yards ahead of me a car suddenly crashed into the median wall, and flipped over several times coming to rest upside down across 3 lanes. All the cars around me quickly slowed down. As I was slowly passing, I looked at the trapped driver and through my closed window I heard him screaming, "Help me! Help me!" Four of us pulled over. I knew it was going to be bad. As I turned on my phone, I saw another man talking with 911.... when I reached the car, the driver was standing next to it. "How did you get out of there?" I asked looking in amazement at the crushed car and then back to the man standing there dazed, but without a scratch. "Don't worry," I said, "your car can be replaced, but you can't be." Then I asked, "What's your name?" "Elliott Walker," he replied. I put my hand on his shoulder saying "Elliott, I can't stay very long, but know that I will be praying for you today." When I arrived at class, I was a little shook up. Knowing I witnessed a miracle, I wished I had said more about how blessed by God he was...you know, do a better job "evangelizing"...my teacher and classmates tried to assure me that by merely stopping and talking with him I had shared my faith and God's love.

It took me the rest of that week to understand something else. When I stopped to help and reached out touching Elliot's shoulder, sharing the compassion and love of God, I too had encountered the risen Christ... Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I didn't recognize him right away. It wasn't about me doing good works...it was about meeting the risen Christ and understanding that He is truly present in our lives...in the Eucharist, yes, our source and summit, but I now know that he can be found where people are in need. In order to embrace the Church's "New Evangelization" each of us needs to share and meet the risen Christ, not only here at Mass as we reverently hear God's word and receive His holy

body, the Eucharist, but out there where people are struggling in the harsh, sin-filled and secular world....believe me when I say that both Elliot and I met the risen Christ that Saturday.

We come to church and we celebrate Mass in order to receive Christ, true enough. But know that we receive Jesus in communion with others and for others. Then when Mass is over we take what we have received...we go out into the world to share the Good News with everyone we encounter....It would be awesome if it stopped there, but there is even more...we get to meet the risen Christ again and again. We do this to make His kingdom come here on earth. Jesus established His Kingdom 2000 years ago. Today we get to participate making it real, in our own lives and in the lives of others. We must share the presence of Christ, not only with the people who are here at St. Brendans, but we must share Him with those who are not here... especially, with those who are not here....and then never forget who it is that we encountered.

Jesus Christ our Lord is risen, Alleluia! Let us go in peace repenting, encountering, witnessing....and glorifying the Lord with our lives, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Cycle C 4th Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 Acts 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God. On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 100:1-2, 3, 5

R. (3c) We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Know that the LORD is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

The LORD is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations.

R. We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Reading 2 Rev 7:9, 14b-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. Then one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have

survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. “For this reason they stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Gospel Jn 10:27-30

Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

It was three years ago April 15 when we saw the terrible tragedy at the Boston Marathon. Thinking about that this week I was drawn to the verses of the second reading today which said, “The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

I was a runner for many years. I immensely enjoyed training, and then running in 20 Peachtree Road Races and 5 half-marathons. Now I volunteer at the race because running is all about celebrating the human spirit. But, seeing traumatized people in such a familiar location, on such a beautiful Spring day, was impossible for my mind and heart to comprehend. Father James Martin said, “Seeing Boston damaged was like seeing a family member hurt. Familiar surroundings, laden with happy memories, suddenly became places of immense sadness.”

But, one insight of that terrible day gives us comfort...we know that we have a God who understands suffering. Everyone on that first Good Friday in Jerusalem knew suffering. When Jesus suffered and was crucified, His disciples, friends and family must have been overwhelmed with emotions. They had followed him into the great city in happiness on Palm Sunday...then were overwhelmed with sadness and fear. So were the people in Boston who had prepared for a joyous occasion...and, then were at a loss to take in all the misery. In familiar surroundings...be it Jerusalem or Boston...there was violence and loss. Father Martin said, “In this Easter season, Boston was taken back to Good Friday.”

But suffering never has the last word. I was immediately impressed with how many heroes ran into the smoke where the bomb exploded. How quickly the police took charge. How fortunate the doctors and nurses were close by to care for the injured. And, it was the small things I heard about that also were heroic and meaningful. I said a prayer of thanks when I heard about runners who after 26 miles, ran another 2 miles to donate blood at the hospital. Or, the people who opened their homes for runners to recover when the race was stopped. And, even though we were physically far away, I recognized being spiritually linked to those people...our prayers do help. There is always the possibility of care and compassion.

This week I read an article written by a medical volunteer, Joseph Murphy, who was at the finish line when the bombs went off. “Before the bombing, I worked a lot.” he said. “Between providing medical coverage

at sporting events and my ongoing research and publishing efforts, I was never home. I realize now that I don't have to cram 30 years of my professional life into the next 5 years of my career. I have adjusted my workdays to be home for the important things I really took for granted. Now I pick up my kids at school most days and we have family dinner every night....there was never a moment where I didn't plan to return to the race. We are simply [going] back doing what we love to do. [But,] Rather than altering my behavior on that single day of the year, I've chosen to change how I live the other 364 days."

It may be difficult to see now, as it was impossible for the disciples on Good Friday to see, but the God who has suffered is ready to help us. The Gospel explains that God loves us so much that "Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand." Jesus is always holding us in the safety of His hand with the promise of something new. When we follow Him, He moves us, He consoles us, He urges us to help each other...help each other move beyond our blood and tears. It's what we do...not as heroes, but as Christians. That was true in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago...it is true in Boston ...and it is true right here today in Cumming, GA. Suffering never has the last word....There is always the possibility of care and compassion.

Cycle B 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."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

R. (6) God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

All you peoples, clap your hands, shout to God with cries of gladness, For the LORD, the Most High, the awesome, is the great king over all the earth.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord. God mounts his throne amid shouts of joy; the LORD, amid trumpet blasts. Sing praise to God, sing praise; sing praise to our king, sing praise.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord. For king of all the earth is God; sing hymns of praise. God reigns over the nations, God sits upon his holy throne.

R. God mounts his throne to shouts of joy: a blare of trumpets for the Lord.

Reading II, Eph 4:1-13

Brothers and sisters, I, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness,

with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature to manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ.

Gospel, Mk 16:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.

The Ascension of the Lord sheds some important light on the mystery of God's love and His intimate relationship with us. It was an event in the life of Jesus and the early church...and, today it is a feast day for Christians, it is a theology and a spirituality. It is all woven together into one big bundle of mystery that we too seldom try to unpack and sort out. Today let's see if we can better understand what the Ascension means.

Just outside Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives you can see the Chapel of the Ascension. It has been a holy site dating back before 390AD marking the place where Jesus ascended into heaven. There is an indentation of a right foot in the rock on the floor under the main chapel dome that is said to be the footprint of Jesus. Today we celebrate Jesus' disappearance from our midst. In awe the Disciples saw that He ascended and was seen no more. Did He complete His work on earth and then went home to the Father? This explanation does not seem quite right, because the Jesus has never been absent. God is everywhere. Is the Ascension a mystery we can understand?

Perhaps it would be better to think of the disappearance of Jesus as part of our homecoming, not His. The disciples had been at home with Jesus. They had shared his company, ate and drank with him, walked with him to Jerusalem, witnessed his death and Resurrection, and spent time with the Risen Christ for 40 days. He had been their companion, the center of their community.

But Jesus had to disappear if they were to be not only be with him...but were to be in Him. With the Ascension and Pentecost, Jesus was transformed from being someone the Disciples were just with. Instead, with the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus became their home. They used to be with his body. Now they became His body, as we today are the Body of Christ. Strange as it may seem, we had to lose Him, if we were to discover this new intimate relationship of being in Him and He in us.

St. Augustine may help us understand the mystery of the Ascension this way. I have shared this with First Communicants several times. He often stressed a very unique quality of the Eucharistic food that we receive during Mass. Ordinary food we eat daily at meal times, he said, becomes part of us. We are what we eat. That's why health foods are so popular today. But the Eucharist, he continued, is different. It is unique in that we become part of it. We become more Christ-like, more patient and kind, more forgiving and understanding. We still live our ordinary daily lives, but it is Christ who inspires our motives, attitudes and actions.

We begin to see people and events through His eyes...to think as He does. When Jesus was on earth, he used his own human hands to reach out to people, but when he wants to feed the poor today, he uses our hands to do this. As St. Theresa said, "Jesus has no hands today but yours and mine to lend the needy a helping hand; no feet but yours and mine to approach others, to visit the sick; no heart but yours and mine to care for others, to be kind to others, to love and forgive them."

During the consecration, Jesus says to us "This is my body, given up for you." The most appropriate response, I think, is for us to say, "And this Lord is my body that I give up for you." We are the Body of Christ, the extension of Christ, the presence of Jesus in the modern world...His hands and feet and heart.

St Augustine famously said that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

Is it starting to make sense?

So like the Disciples, we can rejoice today at the disappearance of Jesus. It is all part of our coming home to God...of God making his home in us.

Our one, Holy, catholic and Apostolic Church is a sign to the world of our home in God....But, the apostles who witnessed the disappearing of Jesus took time to realize that the God who wanted to have only Jews in His community never existed. The Gentiles also were in Him. As the 2nd Reading said:...one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all...

We are all still learning.

You see, while the current Chapel of the Ascension building in Jerusalem was originally reconstructed by the Crusaders, it has in fact been owned by the Muslims since the year 1198AD. Originally converted to a mosque, it was never used because most of the visitors were Christian pilgrims. As a sign of compromise and goodwill, a 2nd mosque was built next to the chapel so the site could be shared as a holy place for Christians and Muslims, as it has been for over 800 years. Some say this place is a sign of God's great love for us...for all of us...Christians and Muslims alike. I think I am starting to understand the mystery of the Ascension.

Cycle C 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 1:1-2, 3, 4 and 6

R. (40:5a) Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Blessed the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked, nor walks in the way of sinners,

nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the LORD and meditates on his law day and night.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaves never fade. Whatever he does, prospers.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Not so the wicked, not so; they are like chaff which the wind drives away. For the LORD watches over the way of the just, but the way of the wicked vanishes.

R. Blessed are they who hope in the Lord.

Reading II, 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 empty ourselves and trust in the Him.

An actress from the 1930's, Mae West, 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 her. And, probably not many in that great crowd of Jesus' disciples in today's Gospel would have argued with this statement either, because they most likely were the equivalent of the middle class today. They weren't hurting, they had no need of a cure, they could afford to travel, and they had no hesitation to follow Jesus, anxious to hear Him teach. These were no common people desperate for their next piece of bread.

Compare them to the author of the first reading. Jeremiah suffered terribly for trusting God. 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 people, found him there and killed him. No wonder that during Holy Week Jeremiah is compared with Jesus himself. Both Jeremiah and Jesus could have been taunted with: 'He trusted in God. Now let God come and save him.'

So who are blessed and who are 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 the 12 apostles from the group of His disciples, came down from the hills with them, and seeing the crowd, He delivered the extraordinary Sermon on the Plain. Jesus said to His disciples: Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, and weeping. They must have been stunned; this teaching was not expected. Blessed? No, they weren't cursed as the poor, hungry or weeping like the crowd of sick and poor nearby.

I am reminded of a story a fellow parishioner, Bob Perfetti, told me about his experience in Haiti. He was busy at the clinic in Hinche making up bags with toothbrush and paste when someone convinced him to visit a church in the remote town of Basam Zim. There he found the rectory with a pitiful garden with no fence to keep out the animals, no running water and the cobwebs in the kitchen told him that no one had eaten there for months. It is hard to imagine these people as being blessed.

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 children, Jesus says can be hindrances when it comes to the Kingdom of God. How can this be?

The heart of the teaching is found in the Gospel’s Beatitudes and the woes. Jesus knew that the poor had already learned to be dependent and how difficult, if not impossible, it is for us to have any sense of dependence on God when we feel rich, consoled, filled and popular. But, it is not the poverty, starvation or sorrow that determines our reward, we can’t earn it even by suffering. And, our riches could become the only reward we get. There is a better way. It is through emptying ourselves that we make room for God and live a life of love prompted by the Holy Spirit. We are blessed when we don’t cram ourselves full. We do it as parents sacrificing for our children. We do it as spouses when we keep our marriage sacred. We do it when we empty ourselves before Holy Communion. We do it when we experience wretched poverty in Haiti and return home blessed. When we walk humbly, take care of the poor and the aliens, and are totally dependent upon God, then true joy and peace will come. On the other hand, when we get prosperous, fat, self-seeking, independent, and disregard the marginalized, then trouble comes.

So who are blessed and who are cursed?

There is a choice, according to Jeremiah: to seek true joy through our own human resources, or seek it in God. Trusting in ourselves ends in spiritual desert. Trusting in God secures salvation. A person who trusts in himself first, wraps himself in a false security of health, wealth and worldly wisdom. But a disciple of God, like Jeremiah, though he may appear to be a fool to some, he is ultimately blessed by God. And, never forget how 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.

We have come to the crux of the matter. As the 2nd reading says, “if Christ has not been raised, then our faith is worthless...But, now Christ has been raised from the dead.” Through our Baptism and faith we don’t merely believe that sometime we are going to die to sin and be raised to a new and transformed life, we actually experience death and resurrection over and over in our lives. Christ is alive in us and takes us where we don’t expect—in fact sometimes where we don’t want to go even in suffering, hunger and grief. He demands a great deal from us, but when we empty ourselves and trust, miracles happen. He calls us to empty ourselves and live for others, not for ourselves. He calls us to give up our cozy lives and go to places like Haiti. He calls, we empty and then He fills

us with His blessings. This is radical. This is our Christian faith. A faith that requires strength....a strength that can only come from heaven.

So who are blessed and who are cursed?

St. Paul answers this way, “We possess nothing, and yet we have everything.” 2 Cor 6:10 God loves us so much that He fills us with blessings when we empty ourselves and trust in Him. “I’ve been full and I’ve been empty. Believe me, empty is better.”

Cycle A The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Reading 1, Ex 34:4b-6, 8-9

Early in the morning Moses went up Mount Sinai as the LORD had commanded him, taking along the two stone tablets. Having come down in a cloud, the LORD stood with Moses there and proclaimed his name, "LORD." Thus the LORD passed before him and cried out, "The LORD, the LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity." Moses at once bowed down to the ground in worship. Then he said, "If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own."

Responsorial Psalm, Dn 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

R. (52b) Glory and praise forever!

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; And blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages.

R. Glory and praise forever!

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praiseworthy and glorious above all forever.

R. Glory and praise forever!

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

R. Glory and praise forever!

Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne upon the cherubim, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

R. Glory and praise forever!

Reading II, 2 Cor 13:11-13

Brothers and sisters, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the holy ones greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Gospel, Jn 3:16-18

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

If you want to catch a Catholic's attention, that is what we say. Today on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity we say it as a profession of faith in the mystery of our one God who is at the same time three Persons; the Holy Trinity--Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The readings today tell us about the mystery of the Holy Trinity by telling us about God. They tell us that God loves us so much that He gave His only son so that we might have eternal life. He sent Jesus not to condemn us, but to save us. All we have to do is believe, and when we do, we realize that we are obliged to respond with praise and service not just for our own good, but for the good of others.

The most radical revelations of God's Word are that 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 will be in God's community forever. God is Three Persons, that is the inner nature of God, that is the life of Heaven, and that is what we are called to be in relationships here on earth, right now, as the One Body of Christ.

God created us to be in and to live in relationships. There we discover ourselves and we find the meaning of life. We come to know who we are when we see and understand ourselves in the eyes of those who relate to us, who know us, and who come to love us. How many times this week did you encounter a community? Even brief encounters can be meaningful and loving. Thursday morning the doorbell rang, my two Jehovah Witness friends came to share what reading the Bible is all about, and how God's Word speaks 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 community, we begin to taste Heaven and to experience the ultimate community of God...the communion of the Three who are One. Not only that, when we live in relationship, in communion, with others we become more than just ourselves. Who we are is expanded, and broadened, and deepened. As the 2nd reading said: "Brothers and sisters, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you." Image what would happen if we conducted our politics that way.

Loving others, you see, isn't something that's simply nice... it is essential. It is the essence of being one with Christ. It is only in loving relationships with others that we can understand that God is love...and that we who love have found God...and that God lives in us.

So rather than being puzzled by the teachings about the Holy Trinity, stuck on the “three-ness of God”, we must throw ourselves into life, into love, and experience the Trinity in our relationships with others. Let us share with each other a life in which we can be so much more of our true selves. It is there that we come to know God. It is in loving others that we can begin to understand the wonder of life, and the joy of knowing who God is and what His life is like.

Today we rejoice in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. It is upon this reality that Christianity is built. The kingdom of Heaven is here among us. Life with God is experienced here.... now. Heaven is not just a carrot dangled in front of us. Heaven isn't just the reward at the end of a road of pain, and trial, and suffering. Heaven exists when we discover ourselves, when we discover each other, when we live a Trinitarian life with others...when we live in communion, in relationship, with others.

So today, at Mass, it is not only the Holy Eucharist we receive. At Mass we experience the ultimate community of God...Holy Communion with the Three who are One and each other... and then we go live that loving Communion with the world, helping others experience God's love. There is no other way, or truth, or life than God.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Amen!

Cycle B 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Ez 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar, from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom. As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, To proclaim your kindness at dawn and your faithfulness throughout the night.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow. They that are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be, Declaring how just is the LORD, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

Reading 2 2 Cor 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

Gospel Mk 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

All of the readings today depend upon images of nature to make their point. It prompted me to think about my Dad who had a green thumb...Happy Father's Day to all you fathers, and you men who are father figures in people's lives. God Bless You....Well as I was saying, my Dad had a gift for growing all kinds of plants, indoors and out. Some of my earliest memories are of being in a garden helping him.

Today's first parable in the Gospel tells us that a farmer scatters seeds on the land and then waits. His ordinary life continues. He would ...“sleep and rise, night and day, and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord, the land yields fruit...” The farmer worked hard, but then he waited for the mysterious process to take place.

When we hear today's Gospel parables, as always there is a “catch”....and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus' parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God's desire for this world.

In this parable Jesus compares the everyday miracle of plants growing to the kingdom of God. Try as we may, the kingdom of heaven is in God's hands. Perhaps we can help by nurturing the faith that was planted in us, but it is God who does the work. Someday, God willing, we will see the harvest of the heavenly kingdom. For Christians, God's work has been our salvation through Jesus, and if it is planted in us at Baptism, we can trust that God...as we heard in the First reading...will accomplish it! This should give us great hope!

Over the last 10 years I have talked about my father in my homilies several times. Today I would like to tell you the rest of the story because I can see that if we trust in God He will accomplish wonderful things in our lives. I remember sharing that when we moved to Georgia from Illinois in 1980, my Dad was one person I didn't miss. He had a way of verbally abusing people that I didn't like. I loved my father, but I didn't like him. Within a year after we moved, my mother was diagnosed with Cancer...it explained why she never came to visit us here. My father stopped working and stayed home to take care of her for nearly two years as the Cancer took its toll. Seeing how dedicated he was caring for my Mom, I realized how much he loved her, and my sisters and I. That began the forgiveness process that rebuilt our relationship for the next 20 years. My father was at my Ordination and he heard my first homily here at St. Brendan's. Then five months later he died while leaving his Lutheran Church one Sunday morning. While we were going through his effects,

we found his baptismal certificate...needless to say I was very happy to discover he was baptized Catholic! I asked the minister if I could assist in the funeral service...he said no, and that was the right thing because in retrospect I was in no condition emotionally to do it anyway. But, then he asked me if I could do the committal service at the cemetery because he wasn't able to go. I turned to the funeral director, who was Catholic, and he had the book, a stole and the holy water ready to go. I like to say that my Dad was Baptized Catholic and buried Catholic, and he wandered around a lot in between.□ I also like to say that God will amaze us with glimpses of His heavenly kingdom if we will only trust Him.

In the Gospel's 2nd parable, the tiny mustard seed (about the size of a pinhead) grows to be a great shrub or even a tree, one that is taller than a man's head! The white mustard species is well known in Israel to grow to ten or twelve feet high with a stem the size of a man's arm! Well how does this apply to the kingdom of God? We are small. The movements of the Holy Spirit in us can be so modest as to be nearly disregarded. Yet if we are patient, if we watch for growth within us, the Spirit gradually will surge up and will let us together yield much fruit. Jesus is saying that the kingdom starts out small like a mustard seed planted in each of us and grows, and grows. Jesus also knew something not so obvious about mustard bushes....they are like weeds. Once they grow and drop their seeds, it is almost impossible to get rid of them. In other words, nothing will be able to eliminate the kingdom once it has been planted....because Jesus Christ is the one who planted it!

Growth is a miracle in plants and trees, but it is even more a miracle in the growing goodness and grace that is God's kingdom in each one of us!!

So today, please tell your father that you love him. That was the last thing I said to mine.

Cycle A 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Wis 12:13, 16-19

There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned. For your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all. For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved; and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity. But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us; for power, whenever you will, attends you. And you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind; and you gave your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

R. (5a) Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon you. Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer and attend to the sound of my pleading.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

All the nations you have made shall come and worship you, O LORD, and glorify your name. For you are great, and you do wondrous deeds; you alone are God.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity. Turn toward me, and have pity on me; give your strength to your servant.

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Reading II, Rom 8:26-27

Brothers and sisters: The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will.

Gospel, Mt 13:24-43 or 13:24-30

Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well. The slaves of the householder came to him and said,

‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ His slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ He replied, ‘No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, “First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ He proposed another parable to them. “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the ‘birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.’” He spoke to them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened.”

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” He said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. On earth as it is in Heaven.” How many times have we prayed those words? Each of us could easily say, “thousands of times at least...too many to count.” But, how many times have we recognized the answer to those prayers?

You see, since the death and resurrection of Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven has begun and is here in our midst. I know because I have recognized I am living in the kingdom. About 48 years ago, I was introduced to a south side Irish Catholic family, the Rocks. Many of us from this family are here in Michigan City this week celebrating GG’s 90th birthday. I blame her and Monsignor Kiran for me becoming a Deacon. As the story goes, when I dropped Pat from our 1st date, her mother asked, “so what Parish is he from?” “Well, Mom, he not from a Parish...he’s Presbyterian.” I know GG gathered her children and they started praying for me. I told her she went a bit overboard...Not only did I become Catholic, now I am a Deacon! Well, GG and her beloved Bob had 6 children and 16 Grandchildren, and now have 11 Great Grandchildren, with another on the way...she is still counting them. And GG is still praying for us all, every morning before she eats breakfast!! I believe we are living the answer to her prayers. I recognized early on there was a strong Catholic community surrounding the Rock family. I knew I had become part of something special...that’s the kingdom of God.

Today’s Gospel tells us what the Kingdom is like. And, the readings say that God loves us so much that He is forgiving, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. He is lenient and permits repentance for our sins. He gives us the Holy Spirit who comes to our aid, interceding and even praying for us with inexpressible groanings. The implications of His love, however, are a real challenge for us.

“Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The parables today illustrate the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven. But if we were listening closely, we didn’t hear about a picture of content that would make us comfortable. The field sown with weeds depicts a Kingdom with both righteous people and sinners. A tiny seed sowed in a field grows into a shrub that attracts undesirable birds. What could Jesus mean by these parables? Where is the mighty and merciful God in a Kingdom filled with sinners and undesirables? If we are honest with ourselves, in our hearts we don’t believe that there is room in the Kingdom of Heaven for sinners like murderers, drug dealers, terrorists or other lawless people. The Kingdom must be only for the righteous and maybe for those whose sins are minor. We are afraid to live with the

lawless and fear what they will do to us or how they will influence our families. These parables are not easy to accept.

I would like to tell you about a friendship my wife Pat and I formed at our home Parish St Brendan's in Cumming, GA with a man named Myron [Shultes].... God rest his soul, Myron died a couple of years ago. I am not going to share anything that Myron wouldn't say himself. To many of us who knew him, Myron was quite a character and loved to tell anyone who would listen about his wild life. I will never forget the 1st time we met Myron as we brought him Communion. He was extremely sick, laying on a bed in the living room of his daughter's house. He thought he was dying and nothing I saw contradicted that. He looked very old...much older than you GG☺...but later I was stunned to find out he was in his 50's. Myron lived a hardscrabble life that finally caught up with him. Nearing the end, he reached back into his childhood Catholic faith and called for a priest. He liked to say he thought the priest was totally shocked hearing his confession ...let's just say there was some truth in everything Myron said. We found Myron to be a gentle and caring soul...with a streak of mischief in him. Over weeks and months we saw a tiny seed of faith rekindle in Myron and blossom. Amazingly, he responded to treatment and his health improved. We saw how he touched our St Brendan's community and how we touched him. I was surprised how many people came to know Myron. His special gift I think was with the Rosary Group that visited the nursing home a few blocks from his house. I heard about the little old lady with Alzheimer's that he took care of during the prayers...she would only listen to him. You see, Myron was one of those weeds that God wouldn't pull out...and he was transformed into good wheat. He had a tiny seed of faith that grew in him...he became a caring man who shared God's love with many people. I think this is what Jesus was talking about in the parables today.

Jesus tells us today that God thinks differently than we do. God knows that if we sinners are expelled now from the Kingdom, many people who are basically good will be thrown out before we choose to repent. There will be a time for separation and judgment, but that time is not now. Jesus says that we have to not only to live in the Kingdom of Heaven with sinners, but we have to show them the same love and concern that we show everyone else. God has a plan and the Holy Spirit will show us the way. Understand too, the presence of sinners doesn't compromise the Kingdom. On the contrary, it provides us many opportunities to share the love of Jesus with generosity and forgiveness.

That's the love GG is sharing every day...Happy Birthday GG! God bless you.

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.

Whoever has ears ought to hear."

Cycle B 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, summoning their elders, their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When they stood in ranks before God, Joshua addressed all the people: "If it does not please you to serve the LORD, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your fathers served beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose country you are now dwelling. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." But the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD for the service of other gods. For it was the LORD, our God, who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, out of a state of slavery. He performed those great miracles before our very eyes and protected us along our entire journey and among the peoples through whom we passed. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 34:2-3, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the LORD;

the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The LORD has eyes for the just, and ears for their cry. The LORD confronts the evildoers, to destroy remembrance of them from the earth.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

When the just cry out, the LORD hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Many are the troubles of the just one, but out of them all the LORD delivers him; he watches over all his bones; not one of them shall be broken.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading 2 Eph 5:21-32

Brothers and sisters: Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands,

love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

Gospel Jn 6:60-69

Many of Jesus' disciples who were listening said, "This saying is hard; who can accept it?" Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, "Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father." As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, "Do you also want to leave?" Simon Peter answered him, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

The readings today tell us that God loves us so much that He gives us the gift of faith so that at times in our lives when the road forks, so to speak, we can make difficult life choices that set our direction and affect every other decision we make...when we chose to serve God it is not a one-time decision, rather it is a choice we will repeat or deny many times.

Several weeks ago I was having dinner with some friends... three of us were Catholic and one was Hindu. My Hindu friend was educated in Catholic High School and College, so let's just say he knows first hand more about Catholic Christianity than I know about Hinduism. Some comments were made about how totally unbelievable Mormon and Islam teachings are. My Hindu friend spoke up and kind of stopped us in our tracks when he said "You know, Christians also have some pretty fantastic beliefs, such as Jesus being God." He was absolutely right and that is what today's Gospel is all about.

For the last several weeks we have been hearing Jesus say "I am the living bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread shall live forever." It is His divine origin as the Son of God that is the crux of the question perplexing the disciples, not the commandment to "eat my body and drink my blood." "This saying IS hard; who can accept it?" It surely isn't logic or knowledge or even human experience that causes us to arrive at our Christian faith. Rather it is the Spiritual part of us that enables us to accept Jesus for what He truly is...It is the spiritual part of us instilled by God that gives us the ability to believe..."It is the spirit that gives life."

As the Scriptures show, however, in spite of the fact that we have the gift from God to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we have the freedom to choose to be Christian, to be followers of Christ...or not. Who is it that we will serve and how will we respond? Are we Christians, quote-unquote, who do not respond to Christ? Like Joshua and the People of Israel, there are certain times in our lives when the day arrives that we must make or renew our choice...It may come at a time of crisis, such as a death or an natural disaster, it may come with spiritual growth during a SFC Bible study or at a Baptism, or it may pop into our everyday life, when we lose our job or get pregnant. When these times come we discover the real priorities in our lives, what is of value and who it is that we choose to serve.

We parents seem to get more than our share of these times of discovery and choice...BTW I like to encourage younger parents: "there is life after teenagers." One such time came crashing into our family. Our youngest son Matt called from college to tell us that his roommate fell 150 feet to his death off a cliff near their house! Immediately we had such a mixture of emotions: crushing sorrow for the family, concern for my son losing a close friend, relief that it wasn't him and even anger that the accident happened because common-sense ignored the horrendous danger...it seemed that 10 or 12 students were at the cliff...It was night... they went there sometimes to talk...no alcohol was involved...they just liked to see the moon-lit valley...Scott slipped and was gone. I remember at the funeral the parent's reactions: The mother was very angry with God that Scott died just as his young life was turning around after difficult teenage years...the father had a true sense of peace about him. Stunned, yes, but being comforted by God. I also remember the crowd of young people, many of whom were experiencing death of a friend for the first time, surrounding the parents with love. God, why do bad things happen to good people?

The life choices we make really determine the character of our relationship with God. When we commit ourselves to Jesus, we enter into a union with God that is deeper than anything we can imagine. But like Scott's mother, at times we may get so angry with God that we feel that we can no longer walk with Him. When we journey with Jesus day-to-day and we come to these decision points, we may not understand or accept things happening around us, but why would we choose anyone else? Jesus is God's Holy One. He has the words of eternal life. This saying is hard. Let's choose to serve Him.

Cycle A 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Is 55:6-9

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked his thoughts; let him turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

R. (18a) The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Every day will I bless you, and I will praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD and highly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. The LORD is good to all and compassionate toward all his works.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

The LORD is just in all his ways and holy in all his works. The LORD is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.

R. The Lord is near to all who call upon him.

Reading II, Rom 1:20c-24, 27a

Brothers and sisters: Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit. Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Gospel, Mt 20:1-16a

Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, the landowner saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just.' So they went off. And he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, the landowner found others standing around, and

said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Today's Scriptures tell us is that God loves us so much that He is merciful and generous. Many times we don't understand. Nevertheless we must respond by sharing His love with others so that God's kingdom lives.

With all the recent news about hurricane Irene and the flooding along the East coast, about the fires in Texas, and then the 10th anniversary of September 11 last week, I am sure many of you felt as I did, more than a little helpless and overwhelmed. We weren't even there, but seeing it on TV vividly reminded me of the flood my family experienced almost 40 years ago...where I learned 1st hand that what doesn't kill you will make you stronger....and that disasters can force us to take stock of what needs to be a priority in our lives...and that no matter how bad off we are, it helps us when we help others.

We were barely 9 months in our brand new 1st house and we didn't know many of our neighbors beyond a wave hello. Our first son Christopher was just 6 months old. Then one night the rains came....12 inches in 3 hours. The storm sewers weren't finished we found out later, so the high ground won. I have never felt so helpless as hearing the flood water pour over the foundation into the lower level family room and seeing it quickly rise toward the 1st floor. We soon abandoned the house and waded through waist deep water to a neighbor's house...my wife Pat with baby Christopher and me with the steel box holding important household papers. I soon determined that insurance wasn't going to cover our loss. The next morning two firemen came in a boat to rescue us...wouldn't you know it, I ended up in the middle, the rowing seat!! A friend who worked with me lived at the dry end of the block. They made us breakfast and then drove us 20 miles to my parent's house through some dicey flooded streets. Throughout this ordeal I realized that all I cared about was that my family was safe...strangely enough all the stuff we lost didn't bother me all that much....even days later when the water subsided, in the midst of the devastation I didn't feel an overwhelming loss. I remember being so tired of cleaning up our mess, and walking next store to get a reprieve by helping them out for a while or sharing a beer. As the weeks and months went by we experienced nothing less than incredible mercy and generosity from God: strangers became life long friends, family showed up to help, and we didn't have to pay back a government loan that put us back on our feet. I learned 1st hand what was truly important and I thanked God for the safety of my family....over and over again. I learned that it wasn't all about me...the important priorities

included my loving family and friends...and, it was important to have God in our lives.

When we hear today's Gospel parable, as always there is a "catch"....and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus' parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God's desire for this world. In today's parable, we shouldn't focus on the workers. The story is about the landowner's loving heart. It is parable about God who so desires that we share life in His kingdom that He persistently invites us in. The kingdom is a gift that God is eager to share; in fact, more than eager, God is doggedly persistent in extending the invitation for salvation. Imagine the kindness of the owner as he repeatedly went out searching for workers and then paid everyone a full day's wage. Were the wages meant to be a fair payment for labor or were they purely a gift from a loving heart?

This matter of grace, this living in the kingdom of heaven that has already begun, is not necessarily rational to us. It is not that God is more merciful than we might be, or more forgiving. You see, God does not even think the way we do. As Isaiah reminds us, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts." Of course, God starts from a different place. God's actions do not spring from need, unless it is the need to give. The whole point of God's love is in giving. We needy humans, however, act basically out of want. It is understandable that we perceive things in terms of fulfilling our needs. And so it is easy for us to focus on the difference of how the workers were treated and think how unfair life is, rather than recognize the gift given by the landowner.

God's bountiful gift of mercy and salvation is neither earned nor deserved. The mercy that Jesus extends even to us sinners who may only respond to His call in the final hour is a gift which characterizes God's kingdom. God deals mercifully with everyone, and salvation is offered for all to accept.

In his book *Searching for God at Ground Zero*, Father James Martin tells a story that happened on the 3rd day of the nearly 30 days he spent at the wreckage of World Trade Center in September 2001. That afternoon he met a retired policeman who had come to Ground Zero to offer his services. "Look up that way," the man said, pointing north where the brilliant sun glittered on the Hudson river, "It's beautiful isn't it?" "Now look over there," he said pointing behind him at the still smoldering

rubble pile, “It’s hard to believe it is the same world.” Then the old cop said, “God would not want any of this destruction, but God has brought every one of us together here. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.” Many times I have heard the commentary about 9/11 mention the over 3,000 lives lost that day, including 343 brave firefighters. Last weekend however, I heard another figure that stunned me...the people working in the ruins of Ground Zero during the months and years after 9/11 numbered over 70,000! And now over 15,000 of them are paying a terrible price with debilitating health issues...some need to have caregivers help them. These people made sure God’s kingdom lives.

Today let us recognize the bountiful mercy and generosity that God’s loving heart is giving to people across America, in Texas; Vermont; New York; Washington, DC; and Shanksville, PA; through all the workers, the volunteers, the donations and in fact through each other. Let us pray as hard as we can for them and then let us pray asking God what you and I, the Body of Christ, can do for others. For you see, there are many people hurting right here in South Forsyth County, in our families, or among our friends. It will be through us and our ministries here at St. Brendan’s that many, many other people will experience the mercy and generosity of God. We make sure God’s kingdom lives.

Cycle C 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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!

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

R. (cf. 1a, 7b) Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

Praise, you servants of the LORD, praise the name of the LORD. Blessed be the name of the LORD both now and forever.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

High above all nations is the LORD; above the heavens is his glory. Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people.

R. Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.

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."

The parable in today's Gospel reminds us that we cannot take them literally. A parable is a story that parallels life situations, but doesn't match them. It casts new light on our lives by being similar in some ways and yet very different in others. Today's parable surprises us when the dishonest steward receives praise for his cleverness in serving his own interests at the cost of his master. But Jesus is not praising the steward's dishonesty. The steward's dishonesty had been discovered and was obvious. Jesus didn't concern himself with the obvious. The steward was, however, taking the necessary steps to secure his future. "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light." What Jesus was concerned with was the lack of spiritual foresight on the part of His followers. So Jesus was presenting His followers with an example of zealous foresight of the wicked steward. If Jesus' disciples were only half as clever at caring for their own souls as the steward was caring for his own welfare, He knew the Kingdom of God would flourish.

It must have scandalized the disciples to realize the foresight of the steward was being praised by Jesus precisely for his prudent vision of what lay ahead of him...not because he was a cheat, but because he was a sinner who dared to hope for redemption. The religious understanding of the Pharisees of that day was a very meticulous spiritual bookkeeping exercise. Everyone had to pray, pay, and obey. Anyone who didn't was considered to be a law-breaker and was cast out. Everything had its price, and everyone had their value in that spiritual economy. But Jesus had a different understanding of our value in God's eyes.

It starts with us: Can we accept that fact that we are sinners? Sinners who can be much like the wicked steward in today's parable? But, are we sinners who dare to hope? It's a question of faith. It's a question of hope. It's a question of love.

So how we can be more clever at promoting the Kingdom of God? Certainly we cannot act dishonestly. But, it is not the steward's tactics that we should copy. Rather, it is his resourcefulness we should focus on and imitate. God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources and the freedom to respond to the world around us. We must serve God passionately and cleverly as children of light lifting up the poor, and not merely as children of this world. The people in today's readings were not condemned because of their economic status, but because of the way they used it for their own advantage. The prophet Amos' merchant wasn't cursed for his business, it was for the way he

cheated his customers and exploited the poor. He wasn't trustworthy. We cannot only act as super consumer children of this world, we Catholic Christians must respond to the small matters of the world around us as God's children of light. We must make decisions every day 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.

Years ago when my oldest son Christopher was a bagboy at Bruno's grocery store in Norcross...he made good money getting tips for helping the customers. One day as he was helping a man load groceries into his car, the man gave him a bill and asked Chris to finish loading because he was going to the drug store across the parking lot. As Chris was returning to the store he reached into his pocket to arrange his money and pulled out a \$100 bill. It didn't take him too long to figure out that the man he just helped must have given him a rather unusual tip. Without too much hesitation he went into the drug store, searched for the man, and returned the money to a rather shocked individual. Back at Bruno's his buddies gave him a hard time about returning the money, but he knew he had done the right thing. Several hours later the man returned to Bruno's asking about the bagboy with the blond hair. Wondering what Christopher might have done to this guy, the other bagboys directed the man to the store manager. The man explained to the manager what had happened, thanking him profusely for having such a wonderful staff, and handed him \$30 to give to Chris. Needless to say, as a father I was proud of my son and I was glad to hear about that man's generosity...I think God was smiling that day.

That's what the readings were about today. We need to serve God, not mammon, in the very small matters of our lives every day, passionately and cleverly as His children of light.

God loves us so much that he gives us the capabilities, the resources and the freedom to respond to the world around us. You know, I think am starting to grasp why so many of our ministries here at St. Brendan's serve the poor. And why it is so important for every one of us to volunteer and serve for the welfare of others, and not just our own. Today at the Festival you will be able to meet our ministries, but let me share one more thing in closing.

Last year Forsyth County Schools served more than 700 students who were homeless! When I first heard that I was stunned. Pope Francis'

words from The Joy of the Gospel struck home: "In this context, we can understand Jesus' command to his disciples: "You yourselves give them something to eat!" (Mk 6:37): it means working...doing the small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter." So what is being done? What could we do to address this situation? 2 years ago a group called Family Promise was formed in Forsyth County knowing that families should stay together—not be separated—during the most difficult times in their lives. They are among 240 Family Promise affiliates across America. This year 12 Forsyth churches who are Sponsors, including Good Shepherd Catholic Church, and 6 Support congregations have launched the program. We are forming a group at St Brendan's to see if we want to become a Support Church teaming with Good Shepherd. This Tuesday, Sep 20 7PM in the Social Hall, we will have a meeting to see if and how we can form a ministry...We will then bring our recommendations to the Pastoral Council and Father Matthew to approve and bless our efforts. Please let me know today if you are interested in joining us...and if you can come to the Tuesday meeting.

Cycle C 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 HAB 1:2-3; 2:2-4

How long, O LORD? I cry for help but you do not listen! I cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not intervene. Why do you let me see ruin; why must I look at misery? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and clamorous discord. Then the LORD answered me and said: Write down the vision clearly upon the tablets, so that one can read it readily. For the vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it, it will surely come, it will not be late.

The rash one has no integrity; but the just one, because of his faith, shall live.

Responsorial Psalm PS 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice: “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works.”

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading 2 2 TM 1:6-8, 13-14

Beloved: I remind you, to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

Gospel LK 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” The Lord replied, “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. “Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table’? Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished’? Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”

When I was very young, maybe only 5 or 6 years old, we lived on a busy street that I couldn't cross alone to go to my friend's house. One day when I was at his house I noticed a Bible in their living room. As little boys are apt to do, I asked why they had a Bible when they didn't believe in God? I didn't get much of an answer as I recall. Later that day when I got home, however, my mother collared me and asked why I had said such a thing to my friend. I replied that I knew they didn't believe in God because the family didn't go to church on Sunday. My mother explained why my logic was faulty and told me to never to say such a thing again because it could embarrass other people and make them feel bad. It wasn't a very good way to share my faith in God. Each of us knows many people, good and generous and loving people who don't have the faith that we have. Today the Scriptures tell us God loves us so much that He gives us faith...it is more just than a wonderful gift of believing in Him, however...it is a grace that allows us to freely respond to God every day, in good times and in bad. Bold and enduring faith is nurtured within a community of believers with the gifts of power and love and self-control that God gives us. We Christians are called to serve others, especially those with little faith. We are expected to share the experience of God's love.

Many times I am sure that we feel like the apostles who asked Jesus to increase their faith. The apostles were concerned with quantity. Jesus focused on quality. He told them the faith they already had was so powerful that it could uproot trees. The good news is that when we trust in this gift of faith, we serve without reservation and miracles can happen. We Christians are expected to serve patiently in God's time and to share the joy of faith that comes by bearing hardships with the strength that God gives us....it's what we do.

Even when we have been intent on serving God, however, difficult circumstances can overwhelm us. As faithful Christians we will be called to endure periods of time when we feel abandoned by God. Our broken hearts and strained spirits cry out to God like Habakkuk in the 1st reading, Why God? How long can this go on? We are called to endure faithfully, waiting for an answer that we are assured will come.

If you have never experienced being fired, or as they call it being downsized, consider yourself blessed, not just lucky. I recall meeting some neighbors at a party and one of them said he had been out of work for 7 months. I remember wondering why he couldn't just go out there and get a job...he must be doing something wrong...I was confident with

my degrees in electrical engineering and an MBA, and my management experience was good insurance...and I always called on the Holy Spirit as my headhunter, praying for His help whenever I was job-hunting. Then the sword fell and I was downsized. Soon my confidence and a comfortable severance package melted away. Panic set in as survival mode became a reality for my family. I remember crying my eyes out when I landed a short consulting job for \$10,000...it was more money than I had earned in nearly 9 months. It was a time of incredible stress and sacrifice. On those tedious days when rejection after rejection had worn me out, I remember reaching into myself searching for God...I called to him begging for some relief...it took 13 months and 3 days to find a job. A true blessing that happened during this time was a friend asking me to attend a men's fellowship on Friday's at 7AM. I couldn't imagine why anyone would want to meet that early in the morning...but, I went to network, I needed a job...what I discovered, however was group Bible study and that's what kept me going back for nearly 7 years. That stressful time didn't consume me...it turned out to be a time of hardship when my flame of faith was stirred like Timothy's in the 2nd reading and my relationship to God came into focus as a priority more than ever before.

While faith is a personal act, it is not an isolated act. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that we can't believe alone any more than we can live alone. Our love for Jesus and our neighbor compels us to share our faith. Each believer is a link in the great chain of believers. As a young boy something prompted me to speak out about faith in God....the Holy Spirit made me do it! And as I struggled to find a job, I benefited from my friend's faith when he invited me to that men's fellowship. We are the ones who faith was given, so we are called to serve and share our faith. And those good people that we know without much faith, maybe, just maybe, they haven't yet met someone who has shared God's gift of faith...maybe that someone is us. As Scriptures told us today, we Christians are expected to serve patiently in God's time and to share the joy of faith that comes by bearing hardships with the strength that God gives us....it's what we do.

Cycle A 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, Is 45:1, 4-6

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, Cyrus, whose right hand I grasp, subduing nations before him, and making kings run in his service, opening doors before him and leaving the gates unbarred: For the sake of Jacob, my servant, of Israel, my chosen one, I have called you by your name, giving you a title, though you knew me not. I am the LORD and there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you know me not, so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun people may know that there is none besides me. I am the LORD, there is no other.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

R. (7b) Give the Lord glory and honor.

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

For great is the LORD and highly to be praised; awesome is he, beyond all gods. For all the gods of the nations are things of nought, but the LORD made the heavens.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Give to the LORD, you families of nations, give to the LORD glory and praise; give to the LORD the glory due his name! Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Worship the LORD, in holy attire; tremble before him, all the earth; say among the nations: The LORD is king, he governs the peoples with equity.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Reading II, 1 Thes 1:1-5b

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace. We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God, how you were chosen. For our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

Gospel, Mt 22:15-21

The Pharisees went off and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech. They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone's opinion, for you do not regard a person's status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?" Knowing their malice, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax." Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that he said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

The Scriptures today tell us that God loves us so much that he chose us...He calls us each by name and arms us. We heard how He did this with the Christians in Thessalonica and even with Cyrus a pagan king. We all are made in His image, we belong to him, yet we wear a human smudge. It is only with divine forgiveness, grace and power that we can repay to God what is God's. And so, we respond to His call with generosity and service to others. We were created for this.

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "*Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.*" There seem to be two kingdoms, God's and Caesar's. Which do we live in?

Are we "Sunday Catholics," giving to God the hour per week at Mass, and then become absorbed with the stuff in our lives: the clothes, the cars, food, sports, houses, work and the almighty dollar? You name it. Are we forever envious and seeking more? Do we find ourselves anxious or afraid? Do we leave it to the good Christians to pray to God, while we live a less than holy life?

Or, do we try it the other way around? Perhaps we are serious about our faith and spirituality, and try to get away from enjoyment of worldly things and to live uncorrupted lives. After all we are spiritual people living an earthly existence. Push this notion too far, of course, and everything of worth and value on earth could become something to shun because we think it is not of God. These are inevitable results, when we picture God and Caesar on opposite sides. But, what would happen if we recognized that we live in His kingdom where both God and Caesar were present together?

A few years ago I was in Naperville; IL to celebrate the 50th reunion of my high school class. Having grown up in Naperville, I recalled many of my childhood activities that weekend. At Ellsworth grade school for example, we became Polio Pioneers in 1954 along with 1.3 million 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders across the country. Polio was a dreaded crippling disease which struck people without warning. I attended the Evangelical United Brethren church where I began my relationship with God and started hearing His call. On October 4, 1957 the Russians launched their Sputnik satellite. Many of us were tested for math and science. I remember taking 7th and 8th grade math in 7th grade, and Algebra in 8th grade so we would be ready for advanced math in high school. But, my favorite memory of all was on the 1st day of high school meeting my best friend Terry in gym class. We ran track together and jogged by the Saints

Peter and Paul Catholic Church on the way to practice. One time I suggested we attend each other's church. Terry said he doubted the priest would let him attend mine, but me coming to his church was no problem□ And I did attend Mass there many times, especially when Terry's dad woke us up early on Sunday morning after coming in late the night before. In 1963 when I declined the invitation to attend a protestant seminary I didn't realize that God would continue to call. I wanted to attend the University of Illinois to become an Electrical Engineer and make a lot of money, after all I was preparing for that since 7th grade. Well, I became a Catholic when I was in college, I graduated with a BSEE, and then He called me to be a husband and father. Finally, some 20 years ago I answered His call to journey with Him even more. Little did I know growing up in Naperville that I would be at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church one Sunday as a Catholic Deacon preaching the Good News on my reunion weekend.

So, what would happen if we recognized that we live in His kingdom, the one kingdom where both God and Caesar were present together? The question then becomes, "what if we were created exactly to be in a place where God is present to the world?" What if, in spite of the voices within us saying that we need more stuff and that we are not worth much without it—in spite of the setbacks of life, the illness, the floods, the death of loved ones, the flatness—what if God created each one of us with room inside where He can come to live, purely out of love for us? In fact, how would it be if God were a companion who truly accepted us and forgave us completely...whenever necessary? Wouldn't this give us another way to look at our life on earth and in heaven?

Yes, I think so. Instead of seeing the people and the goods of this life as answers to our narrow desires, we might gradually allow ourselves to look with appreciation upon them as the blessings they are. As we begin to recognize we are living in His kingdom, maybe we could actually help Caesar to care for the earth and its people. Even small contributions in our life would assume importance because the living God is living among us. This is how being a Polio Pioneer in 1954 was such an important contribution...you see everyone knew someone stricken by polio...like Terry's Dad... but then, within 25 years, by 1979, polio was eradicated from the United States...It was Gone!...and in 2016 only 37 cases of polio were recorded worldwide! Can you imagine...only 62 years to wipe out polio?

The older I get, the more I see how the lessons learned in our childhood formed a foundation for the rest of our lives. I have recognized that we may struggle to believe that God has chosen us and calls us each by name. It takes some serious reflection to recognize God's image in us and others. We will always have a way to go, I know, but His call is here, the time is now, and the grace is ours by God's divine love. You see, repaying to God what belongs to God is called the Christian life. Through the prophet Isaiah God tells us it is He who arms us. And, St. Paul tells us we are loved and chosen by God with Jesus as the King of our realm...and the Holy Spirit is our helper and guide. Instead of greed, instead of having to possess things...generosity and service becomes our identity.

We were created for this!

Cycle A 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Ex 22:20-26

Thus says the LORD: "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans.

"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.

I love you, O LORD, my strength, O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Praised be the LORD, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

The LORD lives and blessed be my rock! Extolled be God my savior. You who gave great victories to your king and showed kindness to your anointed.

R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Reading II, 1 Thes 1:5c-10

Brothers and sisters: You know what sort of people we were among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves openly declare about us what sort of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to await his Son

from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath.

Gospel, Mt 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law tested him by asking, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Several years ago I went on retreat to be with the Trappist monks at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers. The community leader Abbot Francis Michael told us a story about what it is like being a monk. He drew a big circle and said that when God calls you to be a monk it is like stepping into the circle knowing that you will never leave. God tells you there are two rules: first is that He will decide who will live with you inside the circle at the Monastery. You don't get to choose who will live with you. This is not always the easiest thing to do, because sometimes we just don't like certain people. In a Monastery the monks are stuck with each other. The second rule is that you love each other. It sounds simple, but it is not always so simple, even for monks.

As I was listening to Abbot Francis Michael tell this story it seemed to me that living in a Monastery is a lot like being a Christian. When we are baptized, we enter into a community of believers that we will never leave; baptism into the Body of Christ doesn't wash off. God gives faith to those who are in our community and created those who are born into our families...we don't get to choose. Oh, and yes, we are told to love one another. It sounds simple, but sometimes it is very hard, because sometimes we just don't like certain people. Or, sometimes we don't like what people in our own families are doing, but we have to love them anyway. It is not easy being a monk or a Christian. But Jesus, is asking us to reach outside ourselves even farther. "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

A fundamental theme that runs throughout the entire Bible is this: "God offers, we respond." God's offer of love for us is a given; His unconditional love is always offered to us no matter what. The result of His offer, however, is very conditional. You see the result depends upon our response.

How, then, do we respond to Christ's mandate that we love everyone as we love ourselves? First of all, we should take it for what it is - a mandate, a commandment. It is something we must choose to do with little regard for our feelings. It's a matter of what we do; it's not about what we feel.

Feelings are important, but feelings are not decisive. Convictions, things we are convinced of, those are decisive. Feelings are not, and more often than not, acting on our feelings leads us down wrong paths and into trouble. When it comes to giving ourselves to others in love

we have to make decisions. No one can tell us to have warm, fuzzy feelings toward another. Not even God commands that of us. No. It's what we do that matters, not how we feel. Jesus knows that feelings come and go, but our decisions can last.

Isn't Christianity something more than being nice or simply having nice feelings toward others? I mean, even atheists can be nice people. But, when did Jesus ever mention being nice toward others? God does not say: "I was hungry, and you felt sorry for me. I was naked, and you felt embarrassed. I was sick and you didn't want to come near me." God is interested only in what we have chosen to do for others, not in how we felt about them. The only thing that counted with Him was that the hungry were fed, the naked were clothed, and the lonely and abandoned were sought out, and that we stood by them.

Love of neighbors, people outside our family, has a different dynamic than inside the family. Outside we have more choice and maybe we are guided more by feelings from 1st impressions. Inside families we are like the monks, we don't get much choice; we are stuck with whoever God put us with. I remember our first Pastor, Father Hickey, asked me to bring Communion to someone at the Forsyth County Jail. When I first entered the Jail I was a bit apprehensive and my "danger radar" was on full alert. I felt an evil presence like a cloud permeating the halls and cells throughout the building. After a private visit, the guard walked me and the inmate back to his cell. One of his cell mates was waiting at the door. He was rough looking guy with black prison tattoos of chains around his neck and down his arms. When he asked if I would bless him, I thought to myself, "who am I to refuse to bless anyone, even this guy?" And so I prayed with a hand on his head that Jesus would bless him. In the following months I visited with the "Tattoo Man" several times. Once when he told me he saw the Devil twice in his life, I was thinking, "Devil, I am looking at you right now." But, I was somewhat surprised to discover I had no real fear...there was no fear like I anticipated on my first visit. In fact, I recall the "cloud of evil" over time was replaced with more a sense of sadness and sheer boredom of the inmates....and unexpectedly, glimpses of God's love and joy and hope.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate realist. He commands us, He mandates us to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We are to especially love those who are unlovable, those who are particularly shunned and live out on the margins of our lives. He closes our little loopholes, our exceptions; He challenges our prejudice and presents us

with the most demanding of all Gospel messages, allowing us no compromises, no human "wiggle room." The call from Jesus to us is to get extremely serious about what we do...not what we feel.

I don't care how you feel, Jesus says to us, simply love your neighbors. Love them as your heavenly Father loves them. Love them...the good and the bad alike...with the unconditional love with which your Father in heaven loves them. Love all of your neighbors in what you do to them, in what you do for them, and in how you act toward them. All of those complicated and complex feelings of ours will eventually follow along. It's a matter of what we do; it's not about what we feel.

Cycle A 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

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.

Responsorial Psalm PS 128:1-2, 3, 4-5

R. (cf. 1a) Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Blessed are you who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways! For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; Your children like olive plants around your table.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord.

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 weeping 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 His last ones before He was to enter into 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 to their depths, 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, vigilant and prepared with an eye to the future. The foolish ones did not look ahead or make provision 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 servant who lacked courage, who was fear-driven, and who was consequently unproductive. This servant, like the foolish virgins, was looking for an excuse. He was in a state of denial: denying his own responsibilities and the consequences of his actions.
- 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 asking us to have faith. You see, Christ in all these parables is 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 in order to change the world....to help save the world!

God has given us enormous treasures and talents through Christ His Son. We have the power that God has given us, but we need to understand that Christ is interested in productivity. He isn't looking for passive dependent people to follow Him and be His agents here on earth. He wants risk-takers to be His followers...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, I am privileged to be involved with many diverse ministries both here at St. Brendan's and around the Archdiocese. I am recognizing a common thread running through 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, our world, better.

Last Sunday 7 of us from St. Brendan's attended 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 especially at church. They didn't want to be fixed...they want their families to be loved and accepted. Two priests gave testimony on how they and their congregations are being loving homes welcoming everyone. I was moved to tell one mom to please not to give up on 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 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 how else can we help reveal God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven?

Cycle B 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, 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."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

R. (1) You are my inheritance, O Lord!

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot. I set the LORD ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

You will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!

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 Scripture about the eschaton, the end times. All that talk of unsurpassed distress and tribulations, of the powers of heaven being shaken, this will warn us when life as we know it is ending. With all the hunger, pain and suffering we see in the world, sometimes we have to ask, "Is this the end of the world?" C. S. Lewis tells us that "God whispers us in our pleasures, He speaks to us in our conscience but shouts to us in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." The Scriptures today awaken us and give us a message of hope. God loves us so much that Jesus died once and for all, paying the price for our sins, and He promised that at the end of time Jesus will return.... Good will triumph over evil. Jesus never said life would be easy, He said He would be with us always. This day, this moment, this life, is the time to bear the fruit. Seize the day. We only have to trust in God....and live our lives prepared for the end....if we hold onto Jesus we will be prepared, no matter what.

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 is in the boonies today, imagine what it was back then. On Christmas Day 1911 a baby boy was born. The winter was so 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. 100 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 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....to be in control. But when irrational things and events throw us 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 presence of eternity with Jesus, our Lord and Savior. If we are still grasping at all the things of this world, however, then our passage will end up meaningless.

Sometimes we are like the ancient Jews....we latch onto some sacred temple, some investment, some house, some thing, and we think, "Will not this grand thing last forever?" But then when it seems to be going down hill, how quickly we fear, "Is this the end of our world?" How irrational to make our security and happiness depend on any human institution or any human creation. All of these things are passing. All things, including life itself, are passing. How foolish we are if we put all our hopes, all our dreams, all our happiness in earthly things.

A sensible life is to take each day and live as Jesus taught us, as decently as we can, helping others get through their day, and being kinder than necessary because let me tell you everyone we meet is fighting some kind of battle. This day, this moment, this life, is the time to bear the fruit. If we hold onto Jesus we will be prepared, no matter what.

If I could take another minute, I would like to tell you how my father's story ended. Four 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 committal? The funeral director was Catholic and had the Order of Christian Funerals book and the Holy Water. I like to say that my Dad was

baptized a Catholic and buried a Catholic, but during his life he wandered around a little. ☺

Cycle A Last Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus 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.

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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.

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 its everlasting fire. In today’s Gospel parable, He warns that those who neglect the needs of the poor will go off “to eternal punishment.” But there is a question about Hell that I find fascinating and pertinent to the Scriptures today. A few years ago Father Robert Barron asked a question on his web site, Word on Fire: “Is Hell full or empty?”

Fr. Barron explained that 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 freedom, 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, Fr. Barron said that 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. And, though it made Fr. Barron uncomfortable, his hero 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 draw back from saying that we 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. Isn't that what the 2nd reading said: "...so that God may be all in all?" 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. We know from Scripture that God loves us so much that from the beginning He continually sought out his people, inviting us into a covenant relationship. But people of different generations sometimes remembered and sometimes forgot God's love. The ones who forgot it filled their lives with other gods and idols that seemed more attractive. Although death and sorrow and sin had been on the rampage through 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 ministries that he has entrusted to us who are his body. If we have joined this group, then we are one of the sheep who are grateful that we received Christ's love. But if not, if we insist on being goats, we should not be surprised at the end of our lives when 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 all I can do is affirm the choice you have made with your life. You have chosen to live without me, your God, and I will respect your choice." 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 are banished to Hell?

Fr. Barron's own conviction is that von Balthasar was on the right track. Our Catholic doctrine is that Hell exists, but yet the Church has never claimed to know if any human being is actually in Hell. When the Church says that Hell exists, it means that rejecting God's love is a real possibility. "Hell" or "Gehenna" are images for the lonely and sad condition of having refused the offer of the divine life. But, is there anyone in this state of being? We don't know for sure. However, we are permitted to hope and to pray that all sinners, even those in Hell, will finally surrender to the alluring beauty of God's grace.

Fr. Barron suggests that we think of the kingdom of Heaven as a party to which everyone is invited, and think of Hell as the sullen corner into which someone who refuses to join the fun has sadly gone. What this image helps us to understand is that the language which says that God “sends” people to Hell 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.”

The existence of Hell is very real. 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 Fr. Barron says, that God’s grace will, in the end, wear down the even the worst sinner on earth, or in Hell. That’s how much God loves us.

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 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 the opportunity to touch others through the ministries of this parish like the Good Samaritan, the St. Joseph’s Food Pantry and the Giving Tree. All we have to do is get involved. Our help is needed. I would like to take a moment to pray for those who have no one to pray for them especially a family who called into our Hot-Line this week...they were just evicted from their apartment and needed money to pay for a hotel room for 2 days...a single mom, 3 kids, and her disabled mother...let us pray to the Lord, Lord hear our prayer. I am quite sure that every time Jesus was called on for help He didn’t find the timing to be completely convenient. But, if there was a need, He addressed it, regardless of timing, and we are now called to do the same. Never doubt that through our efforts, the grace of Christ the King is changing the world. Somewhere He is wearing down a sinner with His love.

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

Cycle C Last Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

Reading 1 2 SM 5:1-3

In those days, all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron and said: "Here we are, your bone and your flesh. In days past, when Saul was our king, it was you who led the Israelites out and brought them back. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd my people Israel and shall be commander of Israel.'" When all the elders of Israel came to David in Hebron, King David made an agreement with them there before the LORD, and they anointed him king of Israel.

Responsorial Psalm PS 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5

R. (cf. 1) Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

I rejoiced because they said to me, "We will go up to the house of the LORD." And now we have set foot within your gates, O Jerusalem.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Jerusalem, built as a city with compact unity. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

According to the decree for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. In it are set up judgment seats, seats for the house of David.

R. Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord.

Reading 2 COL 1:12-20

Brothers and sisters: Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he himself might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

Gospel LK 23:35-43

The rulers sneered at Jesus and said, "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God." Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are King of the Jews, save yourself." Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews." Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us." The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, "Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

There is a St. Francis of Assisi legend from the 13th century about a ferocious wolf who terrorized the inhabitants of the small Italian town named Gubbio. Not only did the wolf kill and devour livestock but it began to attack and devour humans. All attempts to kill the wolf failed and the people shut down the town in fear whenever the wolf appeared. St. Francis heard of this and decided to go and meet the wolf. The huge wolf rushed toward Francis as soon as he saw the saint approaching, but when St. Francis made the sign of the cross, immediately the wolf became docile. He called out to the wolf: "Come to me, Brother Wolf. I wish you no harm." At that moment the wolf lowered its head and lay down at St. Francis' feet, meek as a lamb. St. Francis explained to the wolf that he had been terrorizing the people, killing not only other animals, but humans as well. "Brother Wolf," said Francis, "I want to make peace between you and the people of Gubbio. They will stop trying to harm you and you must no longer harm them. All past wrongs are to be forgiven." Francis told the wolf that if he ended his attacks he would see to it that the inhabitants of Gubbio would provide him with the food he needed. The story goes that the wolf placed his paw in Francis' hand in agreement. Francis then walked the docile wolf back into the main square of Gubbio to the astonishment of the people, and there he reiterated the promise. Again the wolf placed his paw in the saint's hand in agreement. The wolf lived among the villagers for years. When the wolf finally died of old age, the people of Gubbio were sad. The wolf's peaceful ways had been a living reminder to them of the patience, virtues and holiness of St. Francis. It had also been a living symbol of the love and mercy of the living God.

The Scriptures today tell us that Jesus is the King of all creation. We are reminded how great Jesus is as He is named the image of the invisible God; the firstborn of all creation; the source of all created things; the head of the body, the church; the beginning; the firstborn from the dead; and the crucified King. Jesus is our King in all these ways and infinitely more. Today is the feast of Christ the King. How fitting it is that we celebrate Jesus on the last Sunday of the Year of Mercy...The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, our King and Savior.

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but he is more approachable than our modern-day kings who have to be surrounded by security. He is a king who is a servant, not distant royalty. And Jesus is here with us, not out there somewhere where we have to go to Him....He is present right here with us today in the Word of God we heard today, in the Eucharist we celebrate from this altar, and in every one of us, His body, the Church.

Today we find ourselves, by the power of the Gospel we've just heard, standing by the Cross, watching Jesus. We have heard a passage from the Passion of the Christ according to Luke. Jesus has been crucified. Here in this exchange is caught and condensed the whole meaning of what was happening: the forgiving, the acquitting, the life-giving death and the resurrection of Jesus...its capacity to take any of one us, however down among the dregs we are, it takes us somewhere else, somewhere better...in fact, forever. "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." God's love and mercy shine through in the last human exchange of Jesus' life. And as we leave this Year of Mercy, we might leave wondering: How can we enter into the kingdom of Christ? The readings give the answer. There is nothing so regal...there is nothing that so lifts the darkness...there is nothing that so brings His kingdom into our hearts and the world, as Jesus Christ Himself ...He is our King and Savior, who forgives the sinners and loves the unlovable.

So this year we need to ask who are the wolves of Gubbio in our lives and how are we dealing with them? Are we like the villagers who went out and were defeated, or like St. Francis who went to tame the wolf, not destroy it? When we approach the snarling wolf do we make the sign of the cross, not relying on our own resources but rather calling on that perfect love and mercy from Jesus Christ? Do we recognize that the wolf was acting out of hunger? So often we sin not out of pure malice but rather out of our own hunger, need and fear. Francis knew this and sought to heal the root cause...and the saint did this by bringing the wolf back into relationship with the very ones he had been terrifying! It was the people of Gubbio and their relationship with the wolf that allowed the wolf to overcome his hunger, need and fear. Francis does not tame the wolf and then send it off to a distant land. No. The process of taming continues within the the wolf's ongoing relationship and life with the townspeople. So, are we seeking true justice and true healing in our relationships? We have to move beyond the sad logic and bitter cycle of hatred and violence, of pride and prejudice in our world. It will only be God's love and mercy that allows us to do so.

One last thought. How often do we yearn for God and listen for His voice...yet so easily we disregard the very thing we yearn for most? Do we see that many times the strongest and most terrifying wolf who does the most damage is not someone else, but is within us. We all have a wolf within. The question is to what extent is that wolf ravaging and to what extent will it be tamed?

This week I was reminded of a gift I received as a child. It's a gift we have all received and we learn to share it, but most of the time we really don't appreciate it. You see, I recalled being a five-year-old praying with my mother at bedtime. "...Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in Heaven..." I opened the gift after she left...I continued to pray and talk with God....and, I haven't stopped yet. So I invite you now to pray with me to Christ the King: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen!" Alleluia!

Cycle A 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, 1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon answered: "O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request. So God said to him: "Because you have asked for this-- not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right-- I do as you requested. I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

R. (97a) Lord, I love your commands.

I have said, O LORD, that my part is to keep your words. The law of your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Let your kindness comfort me according to your promise to your servants.

Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

For I love your command more than gold, however fine. For in all your precepts I go forward; every false way I hate.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Wonderful are your decrees; therefore I observe them. The revelation of your words sheds light, giving understanding to the simple.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Reading II, Rom 8:28-30

Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he

predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

Gospel, Mt 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

"Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

A few years ago you may have read about Randy Pausch who died at age 47. Dr Pausch became famous for his “last lecture” at Carnegie Mellon University, while living with and dying of pancreatic cancer. He gave his last lecture “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams” on September 18, 2007. It celebrated his life, the one he had dreamed of since childhood, instead of concentrating on the impending death that he didn’t know was just 10 months away. The moving and often humorous talk recounted his efforts to achieve his childhood dreams, such as becoming a professional football player, experiencing zero gravity, and becoming a Disney Imagineer, those people who create the Disney World attractions. He shared his insights on helping others enable their dreams, finding the good in other people, working hard to overcome the “brick wall” obstacles in our lives and living generously. Dr. Pausch said that he could look back and say, “pretty much any time I got the chance to do anything cool, I tried to grab for it. And that’s where my solace came from. We don’t beat the reaper by living longer; we beat the reaper by living well and living fully.”

Today’s Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that he gives us a very special, priceless gift, the Kingdom of Heaven, not because we earned it or deserve it, but purely because he loves us. All we have to do is accept it. We could take it’s benefits and run, but as Christians what we have been given, we must now give to others.

In today’s short Gospel, Jesus tells us parables about the buried treasure and the pearl of great price, something or someone in life we find that is of such value that we are willing to “sell all we have” to obtain it. Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a very human experience of finding something so valuable that it shapes the rest of our life. Nothing is of any value in comparison to what we have found. But as always there is a “catch” in the parables....and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus’ parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God’s desire for this world.

In today’s parables it’s easy to focus on the treasure and the pearl of great price in a way that is about our personal desires. “What is it in my life that I consider so valuable that I would be willing to reorient my life for this, sell all that I have for this one thing or someone?” Even the most unselfish response: “The things I want are an end to war, a cure for cancer, health and happiness for my family”; these wishes would be missing the point of the parables. What Jesus says is that the Kingdom of Heaven is

God's desire, that is what is more precious, more valuable than anything else, and it is worth selling all we have to receive it. This is certainly what Jesus did. For Jesus the pearl of great price was his relationship with his "Abba" and his passion for God's dream for the world. Nothing else was of any value to Jesus. He was so alive in God that everything had to be in alignment with God's Will, God's desire for mercy, compassion, and justice.

Nothing in the world can compare to the joy brought by the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a priceless gift given to us by God, all we have to do is accept the Good News that the Risen Christ is alive in His Word, in the Eucharist and in us. As followers of Christ when we realize that the treasure is ours, like Solomon in the 1st reading, we change, and then respond to God's blessings by serving others. God gives the precious Kingdom of Heaven to everyone, to the saints and the sinners, and then He watches to see how it affects our lives and what we do with it.

We may never know what impact God's love has when we serve others. Dr. Pausch said, "like Moses, I have seen the Promised Land but never will live in it, but that's okay." After his death, his wife Jai said her husband was proud that that his last lecture and book "inspired people to revisit their priorities, particularly their relationships with their children." I highly recommend you view the last lecture at the Carnegie Mellon or TED Talk web sites. https://www.ted.com/talks/randy_pausch_really_achieving_your_childhood_dreams you will want to hear him explain the real reason for his last lecture. It wasn't the obvious legacy of the influence of his body of work that may impact how our children learn computer programming in future years. It was a special roadmap for some special people in his life....his 3 children.

Have you figured out my head fake? This book is for everyone who reads it because God loves you!!
Grandpa Fraser/Roger

Grandpa's Playlist

Gather some friends or family together with your smartphones.
Take turns playing your favorite songs...someone play from my list:

1. Adele - Rolling in the Deep
2. Andrea Bocelli – Nessun Dorma and Con Te Partiro at Leicester
3. Art of Noise – Moments of Love
4. B.J.Thomas - Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head
5. Barbara Lewis – Hello Stranger
6. Barbra Streisand & Barry Gibb – Guilty
7. Billy Idol - Eyes Without A Face
8. Billy Preston & Syreeta Wright - With You I'm Born Again
9. Brenton Wood - Oogum Boogum
10. Buddy Holly - Peggy Sue
11. Chris Tomlin - Your Grace Is Enough
12. Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young – Woodstock
13. Daryl Hall & John Oates - One On One; I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)
14. Don McLean - American Pie
15. Ed Sheeran - Thinking Out Loud
16. Ephraim Lewis - Drowning in Your Eyes
17. Falling Slowly - Once
18. Gary Brotsma - Numa Numa
19. George Duke - The Simple Things
20. Gorillaz - DARE
21. Gregorian Chant - Deum Verum
22. Gwyneth Paltrow & Huey Lewis – Cruisin
23. Hootie & the Blowfish - Only Wanna Be With You
24. Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo'ole - Somewhere over the Rainbow
25. Jefferson Airplane -White Rabbit
26. Jimmy Sommers – Lowdown
27. K.D. Lang - Constant Craving
28. Kingston Trio - Scotch & Soda
29. Lauren Wood - Fallen
30. Leslie Odom, Jr., Lin-Manuel Miranda - Dear Theodosia
31. Linda Ronstadt – Ooo Baby Baby
32. Michael Feinstein - Our Love Is Here to Stay
33. Nora Jones – Don't Know Why
34. Norman Brown - That's The Way Love Goes

35. Peter White – Venice Beach
36. Phil Collins - In the Air Tonight
37. Rebekah Del Rio - Mulholland Drive - LLorando (Crying)
38. Simple Minds: Don't You Forget About Me
39. Spandau Ballet – True
40. Tears For Fears - Everybody Wants To Rule The World
41. The Black Eyed Peas - I Gotta Feeling
42. The Flamingos - I Only Have Eyes For You
43. The Rolling Stones - Gimme Shelter
44. Toto - I won't hold you back
45. Ylvis - The Fox (What Does The Fox Say?)