

## 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B Cycle

July 1, 2012

**INTRODUCTION:** The first reading (Wisdom 1, 13-15.2.23-24) tells us God did not make death. Rather, it came about through the envy of the devil. This is obviously a commentary on the story of Adam and Eve in the garden - how they tried to find their happiness and fulfillment by making their own rules rather than doing what God told them to do or not do. They thought God wanted to prevent them from being happy instead of trusting that God had their best interests at heart. When the devil convinces us we need to do things our way and not God's way in order to find happiness, we find death instead. The two miracles in today's gospel (Mark 5, 21-43) show us what can happen when people really put their trust in Jesus. The second reading is an appeal to the Corinthians (II Cor. 8,7.9.13-15) for financial help for the poor in Jerusalem.

**HOMILY:** While our government will now be providing health care for many more people, our gospel today tells us not to forget that God too is interested in our well-being. Today in the gospel he shows us the blessings that come to those who have faith in him.

Today, and the next couple of weeks, we will hear more about Jesus' healings. Today's gospel is one of the most detailed descriptions we find in the gospels of Jesus' healing work. Next week we hear something very surprising about Jesus when he goes to his hometown of Nazareth. Mark tells us because of their lack of faith there, Jesus "was not able to perform any mighty deeds there - apart from curing a few sick people." The following week we heard about Jesus sending his Apostles to the nearby villages to drive out demons and to heal the sick. They anointed the sick with oil and cured them. The oil is a detail only Mark tells us about. The use of oil to heal the sick is also mentioned in the Letter of James. James says, "is anyone sick among you, he should call for the priests of the Church and let the priests pray over them anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick persons, and the Lord will raise them up. If they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them." (James 5, 14 - 15) So, for three weeks we are going to hear about Jesus' healing ministry. There is an insert in the bulletin that says more about healing and because our gospels focus on it, I intend to have the anointing of the sick next Sunday after all the Masses.

There are two details in today's gospel I've never noticed before, and I want to point them out to you. Notice Jesus does not pray over people when he heals them. Usually he touches them or just speaks a word to them and they are healed. In the Acts of the Apostles, we read when the Apostles healed anyone they did it in the name of Jesus or in the name of the Lord. The Letter of James tells people if they are sick to call for the priests of the Church and the priests will pray over them anointing them in the name of the Lord. Jesus certainly prayed a lot - but he didn't pray over people when he wanted to heal them. He didn't need to invoke anyone's name or ask anyone's intercession for he did it by his own authority and power.

The second detail I want to point out is this: The woman with the constant flow of blood was considered unclean by Jewish law. That doesn't mean she was sinful, although the ordinary

person at that time would probably have thought that God was punishing her for something evil she had done. That was their thinking. The condition of being unclean simply meant a person was not allowed to participate in public religious activities such as going to the Temple. If anyone touched a person who was unclean, such as a leper or a dead person, then they became unclean. They were unclean until they were purified - usually by a ceremonial bath. The woman with the flow of blood would have been considered unclean, just as if she had leprosy, and anyone who had contact with her, even if by accident, would become unclean. There was a superstitious belief at the time that if a person with healing powers touched or was touched by a person who was unclean, the person with spiritual powers would lose their power. Thus the woman in the gospel had this dilemma, she thought contact with Jesus the healer would heal her, but her contact with him might destroy his power to heal. If she asked him to touch her, he might refuse. So, as we are told, she secretly touched his garment. "Instead of uncleanness passing from the woman to Jesus, healing power flows from Jesus to the woman." (Joel Marcus, Mark 1-8, pg 367) This same flow of healing power brought Jairus' daughter back to life.

The word "save" is a very important concept here. It has a surface meaning and a deeper meaning. The root meaning is "to rescue from danger." On the surface, it means a release from chronic or life-threatening illness. On a deeper level, it means God rescuing a person from the realm of the dead or from the sufferings that will come at the end of time. One cannot read this story about Jesus raising Jairus' daughter back to life without being reminded of Jesus own resurrection. Especially is this true if you were reading the gospel in the original Greek for the same words are used; Jesus tells the girl to rise, just as he will be raised and she arises just as he will arise from death after three days. We are, in our modern day world, blessed with wonderful health care workers. But we can't think we can get along without Jesus. There are limits to what doctors and nurses can do. We are not going to live in this world forever. God made us for better things. Jesus can help us with our everyday problems if we come to him and have faith in him, but only Jesus can help us in the most profound sense of the word "save." Jesus' death and resurrection is a definitive triumph over death and evil and it is our way to salvation and eternal peace. Amen.

## **Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time - B Cycle**

**July 8, 2012**

**INTRODUCTION** - Ezekiel 2, 2-5; II Cor. 12, 7-10; Mark 6, 1-6

Sometimes prophets predicted the future, but most of the time their task was to remind God's people of how God wanted them to live. Their efforts were not always appreciated by the people who heard the message. The prophet Ezekiel lived about 600 years before Christ. He had to warn the people of the national disaster that was headed their way if they did not change their ways. In the beginning of his book he describes, as much as it is possible, a vision of God in heaven. He was so overwhelmed he fell flat onto the ground. This is where our first reading

comes in. God got him back on his feet and commissioned him to be a prophet. God cautions Ezekiel that as a prophet he would not have an easy job of it. The passage prepares us for the gospel that tells of Jesus, the greatest prophet of all, who was rejected by his own people when he came to preach in his hometown of Nazareth.

**HOMILY** - Sullivan went to his favorite race track and after a couple of races, he noticed on that particular day a priest was there who always went to one of the horses that would be running in the next race and gave that horse a blessing. Sullivan noticed too that the horse that had been blessed always won. For several races he watched this with great interest. It happened every time. Finally, for the last race, Sullivan decided to bet everything he had on the particular horse he saw the priest had blessed. As the horses were racing around the track, the horse Sullivan bet on dropped dead. Sullivan couldn't believe his bad luck and went up to the priest. He told the priest, "I watched you bless every one of the winning horses, so I bet everything I had on this last race, and that horse dropped dead. What happened? The priest looked at him, shook his head and said: "you must not be Catholic because you don't know the difference between a blessing and the Last Rites."

The sacrament of the sick we are offering today used to be called the "Last Rites," or "Extreme Unction." That's because people forgot the primary purpose of that sacrament is originally and principally a blessing for a sick person. During the Middle Ages, theologians began stressing the spiritual effects of this sacrament as a preparation for a person to meet our Lord in death, and its main purpose (for the healing of the sick) was relegated to a secondary position. I remember times how embarrassed I would be to stand at the death bed of a 96 year old man or woman who definitely was dying and who was looking forward to being free of his or her suffering and in administering this sacrament of the anointing I would have to be saying prayers that that person would soon be up and about, ready to resume their former duties. In other words, the prayers that were part of this sacrament were always prayers for healing, but the current theology at the time was to wait until a person was very near death before they received the sacrament. Sometimes the priest wasn't called until it was too late. This was one of the things the Vatican Council did - to re-emphasize the primary purpose of this sacrament and started calling it by its real name: The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. I have a great deal of faith in the power of this sacrament. It is my custom whenever I visit someone who is sick, whether in the hospital or a nursing home or at home, I usually give them the Anointing of the Sick. It is still administered to those who are dying, but there are special prayers for a dying person and I no longer have to pray that a 96-year old grannie is soon able to resume her former duties.

Faith is important as we receive it, faith that in this sacrament Jesus is touching us, that's all the faith we need. This does not necessarily mean we have to have faith that he will cure us, and that if we're not cured then it's our fault because we didn't have enough faith. Some of the faith healers on TV give that impression. You might even get that impression from St. Mark's gospel today. He tells us Jesus was unable to perform any mighty deeds in his hometown apart from curing a few sick people because of their lack of faith. (That is, they didn't have faith in him as God's prophet!) I'm sure there aren't many people who have more faith than St. Paul had. Yet look at today's second reading. St. Paul suffered some "thorn in the flesh." In the next sentence,

Paul talks about weakness. You might think it was some kind of physical ailment, but we don't know for sure. Some scholars believe it is the daily worry and care of the Churches he founded that he is referring to. Whoever can say what it was for sure has the answer to the proverbial \$64,000 question. The important lesson to learn from this reading is that in spite of Paul's prayers to God that God relieve him of it, God did not. God simply said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I believe what this means is that sometimes our sufferings can be a blessing to us, although it may not seem that way at the time. I know when I was a child I suffered asthma for many years, and as I see it now, I know that suffering brought me closer to God. We need to have faith with any sacrament, faith that Jesus loves us, faith that he hears us, faith that in some way that sacrament will bring God's blessing and grace to us. It may not be the exact blessing we think we want; it may be a blessing God thinks we need.

Actually, sometimes Jesus healed people who had no faith at all. For example, when he raised the son of a widow back to life. It happened simply as he was walking toward the town of Naim. He encountered a funeral procession coming in the opposite direction. He stopped the procession and raised the dead person, the son of a widowed mother. Or in John's gospel, Jesus came up to a man who had been crippled for 38 years and just told him to get up and walk. Jesus was immediately lost in the crowd before the man even got to know who it was who cured him. But usually Jesus says, "your faith has saved you" after he heals someone. I think in the final analysis, faith is putting into God's hands what we can't control and believing always that he's with us, that he's interested in our welfare and that he loves us. Amen.

### **Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time - B Cycle**

**July 15, 2012**

#### **INTRODUCTION - (Amos 7, 12-15; Ephesians 1, 3-10; Mark 6, 7-13)**

Sometimes prophets predicted the future but most of the time they tried to direct God's people to live by God's laws. Consequently, those who were not living according to God's laws usually did not appreciate the prophet's reproach. Our first reading today is taken from the Book of the Prophet Amos. Amos lived over 700 years before Christ. At that time and in that culture there were professional prophets who made their living by telling people how to solve their problems, giving them advice, predicting the future, etc. These professionals were often servants of pagan gods and they did not speak for the God of Abraham. They usually spoke the kinds of things their clients would be pleased to hear because if they offended their client they would not have been paid their fee. When Amos went to Bethel, where there was a temple in competition with the true Temple in Jerusalem, Amos did not have comforting things to say to the people about the way they were living. He warned them of great disaster they would suffer if they didn't change their ways. The high priest of the Bethel sanctuary, Amaziah, mistook him for one of the professional prophets and told him to get out of town. Amos protested that he was not a career prophet, rather he was living a nice peaceful life as a farmer and God called him to go to Bethel and warn the people that their sinful lives would lead to destruction. Today's passage prepares

us for the gospel where Jesus sends his apostles out to preach and warns them that their message may not always be well received.

**HOMILY:** Last week's gospel told us of Jesus' rejection by his relatives, friends and neighbors in his hometown of Nazareth. Today, Jesus is preparing his apostles to go out for the first time to announce God's kingdom by healing and casting out demons. It could be a difficult assignment. The job of telling people they need to repent and change their ways is not always popular. John the Baptist had some success in preaching repentance, but most of us know what happened to him. Jesus and his apostles would also have known what happened to the Baptist. So he warns his apostles to move on if they are not accepted. They should even shake the dust of the town from their sandals.

A number of themes suggest themselves in today's gospel; for example, the theme of the rejection of the true prophet of God such as happened to Amos and John the Baptist and Jesus, the greatest of all prophets who came to teach us God's ways. There are many other topics that would be worth dwelling on, but let me get to the one that occupied my reflections on the gospel this week - the theme of simplicity. In today's gospel, we have no details as to where the apostles were to go, how long they would be gone, or what Jesus was going to do in the meantime. We are given a lot of detail about what they were allowed to take with them - one tunic, sandals and a walking staff. (Luke does not even allow a walking staff and Matthew does not allow either the staff or the sandals). Jesus wanted them to learn to trust God to care for their needs. In the light of this austerity, I examined myself - as I believe St. Mark wants his hearers to do. I trust in God, but I reflect on all the stuff I take with me when I just take a day off, not to mention all the other stuff I surround myself with, especially books and closets full of stuff. We are a society with lots of stuff. There is an insert in today's bulletin on living simply. One of the things we see in many people who want to live a life centered on God, such as hermits and monks and people like St. Benedict and St. Francis and St. Dominic, is that they try to live very simple lives. So many things can get in the way of our spiritual growth, especially the TV. I seldom have mine on, and I seldom miss it, unless when I want to see the news. I do admit, however, of having lots of clutter and I've read a couple of books on how to reduce clutter, but I don't have time to do it. That's another area where we all have a lot of clutter: our busy schedules. It's important that we don't keep ourselves so busy that we don't have time to pray. In our busy-ness we have to keep in mind what our priorities are or we will find ourselves going around in circles. God should be our highest priority.

Maybe St. Francis could follow the gospel literally, but in our society people will probably keep wearing shoes and changing their clothes occasionally. In order to get to church, most everyone here needs a car (and it's nice if you have a check book too). Few of us have neighbors who will invite us to dinner every night, so we need food and a roof over our heads (especially in the winter). It doesn't get so cold in the Middle East and the apostles lived in a culture where hospitality was automatically offered, so they could survive on less.

However, I do want to mention four things we can especially do without as we make this journey through life: ONE is guilt. Guilt can be healthy or unhealthy. Healthy guilt is something we feel

when we have failed to live up to our ideals and our values. When we fail, there is a way of taking care of that. We ask forgiveness. If we have offended against our spiritual ideals, we ask forgiveness of God and start over. Sometimes we don't forgive ourselves and thus we keep our traveling bag always full of guilt. When God forgives us, we have to forgive ourselves. The **SECOND** thing we need to get rid of is unforgiveness of others. Some people just hold on to grudges forever. The grudges we hold on to usually hurt us more than the people we are angry with. Remember when we pray, we pray that God forgives us as we forgive others. A **THIRD** thing is fear and worry. Fear helps us prepare for problems and prepare ourselves how to deal with them and in that it is healthy. But some people worry about everything - most of which they can't do anything about. Jesus asks us to have more trust in God as we travel this road of life. **LAST** but not least, get rid of ingratitude, especially toward God. We need to thank God daily for his blessings, and that's what brings us here today - to say Thanks. Amen.

## **Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**July 22, 2012**

(Jeremiah, 23, 1-6; Ephesians, 2, 13-18; Mk. 6, 30-34)

**INTRODUCTION:** Our first reading is from Jeremiah the prophet who lived about 600 years before Christ. As I explain the reading, I'll begin by explaining the second half. Jeremiah pronounces a solemn promise from God that begins with the words: "The days are coming says the Lord..." The promise that follows these words is a promise meant to give hope to God's people who had been scattered by the Babylonian invasion. It would be many days before God's promise would be fulfilled - 50 years before the people could return to their homeland from Babylon and almost 600 years before the king whom God promises would arrive. We know the promised king was Jesus the Christ, an offspring of David who ruled God's people with wisdom, establishing justice and security in the land. We still wait and pray for the promise of justice and security to be fulfilled. The first part of our reading uses an image that goes back almost 4000 years where the king was referred to as shepherd of his people. In the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the king was considered to be the shepherd of God's people. Most of the time the kings of Israel and Judah did not rule according to God's laws. The gospel applies the same image of shepherd to Jesus who will faithfully lead God's people as God desires.

**HOMILY:** Last week's gospel ended with Jesus sending his apostles out to preach repentance, drive out demons and heal the sick. In today's gospel, they return to Jesus to report how their mission went. Jesus recognized they all had a need for some rest and some quiet time. They were no doubt looking forward to just having him to themselves for a little while, but that did not happen. Jesus and his apostles had stirred up a great spiritual hunger and hope in many people and they came looking for their hunger to be satisfied. We notice that when the people found Jesus, he was not annoyed or too busy to for them. He was moved with compassion for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus, first of all, satisfies their spiritual hunger by teaching

them, giving them directions on how to live, how to love God and one another, encouraging them, perhaps helping them to understand the meaning of their lives. Today's gospel is also preparing us for what is to follow, where we will hear in the next few weeks how Jesus satisfied their physical hunger in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

Two ideas struck me as worthy of our reflection. Think how privileged the apostles were to have Jesus with them all the time. We have Jesus with us all the time too. But as St. Augustine famously said in his book, the Confessions, when he came to know Jesus: "You were with me, but I was not with you." Like the apostles, we need to take time off just to be alone with him. We are doing that right now but going to Mass on the weekend is a minimum. I believe we also need to take time during the week. Without spending some quality time with Jesus during the week, the weekend Mass may not be so meaningful for us. Besides my daily Mass and the saying of the Divine Office, I usually try to spend an hour a day in some form of quiet prayer such as the rosary, or studying the Scriptures or just sitting quietly in Church. This is a great privilege for me and having this opportunity has been a great blessing for me.

The second idea worthy of our reflection is expressed in the last words of today's gospel: the people were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them. Seeing Jesus as the good shepherd is one of the most popular ways to imagine him and one of the earliest ways Jesus was portrayed in Christian art. Psalm 23, "the Lord is my Shepherd," is the best known and best loved of all the 150 psalms. Having Jesus as our shepherd presupposes we allow him to lead us; in other words, we allow him to teach us and continue to teach us. We are never finished learning from him. Many, many people in our culture went to Catholic schools. Some continue to stay active in their faith and others have put it in a drawer with their diploma and forgotten about it. This group feels as if they know all they need to know about religion. They are like some of the students I taught when I taught high school religion. Often students would complain, "why are we studying this stuff, we learned this in grade school." It's as if you can come to know all you need to know about Jesus with a few little lessons. We're never finished learning. I love this quote from St. John of the Cross: "We must ... dig deeply in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many pockets containing treasures: however deep we dig we will never find their end or their limit. Indeed, in every pocket new seams of fresh riches are discovered on all sides."

For myself, I continue to be fascinated with the scriptures and continue to learn from them, even after studying them for over 50 years. You could say that I'm just a slow learner - and that may be true - but it's also true that we can never exhaust the riches we can discover as we come to know our Lord more and more deeply.

Jesus teaches us in many different ways, not just through the Scriptures. He teaches us in our daily prayers and meditation, in the Mass, in our interaction with others, in the saints, through the teachings of the Church, through spiritual books, even through the difficult challenges that life brings us. We call ourselves disciples. The word disciple means learner. When we've quit learning, we've quit being a disciple. The last line in today's gospel tells me: if we want to have Jesus as our shepherd, then we must allow him to be our teacher. Jesus saw the people like

sheep without a shepherd - so how did he shepherd them - "he began to teach them many things."

## **Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**July 29, 2012**

Last week's gospel told us Jesus and his disciples tried to get away for a little while from their ministry of teaching and healing so they could get some rest. But somehow the crowd found him. He was not annoyed or angry that he and his disciples were going to miss out on this well-needed time to rest. Rather, he saw the crowd as sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things. After meeting their spiritual needs, Jesus knew they had gone a long time without eating. So Jesus provides what the people needed for their empty stomachs.

Many people have asked, "did this really happen?" Because we have no details how it happened, many have tried to deny there was anything miraculous about what Jesus did and they invent some natural explanation of what took place. The story is presented to us as something awesome and marvelous. We just have to take it on faith. It is clear from all that we know that if something memorable and miraculous did not occur when Jesus fed 5000 people with five barley loaves and two fish, then we might as well deny all the other miracles in the gospels too. I say this because there is no other miracle in the gospels (except for the resurrection of Jesus himself) that is so well attested to and confirmed as genuine. It is the only miracle (again except for Jesus' resurrection) that is found in all four gospels. You might notice that John's gospel does not use the word "miracle." He calls it a sign as we heard today: "when the people saw the sign he had done..." A sign is something that seeks to communicate some deeper reality to us. John is very explicit and expansive about what the multiplication of the loaves and fishes is trying to tell us. During this year (liturgically called "year B") most of our gospels are taken from St. Mark. At this point, however, we leave St. Mark and for five weeks, counting this week, we will reflect on St. John's much longer version of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and what it all means. This is one of the most beautiful chapters in the gospel as far as I am concerned.

I do have some other items I want to talk about today. Starting with a personal item, I have acquired an additional responsibility. I have been appointed as Parochial Administrator of St. Leo for three months. I have been assured it will not involve much additional work. The pastor, Fr. Jim Schutte, is going away for three months to study. There is a priest who will say Mass there during that time. I tell you this so you don't have to hear about it by way of rumor.

Another item concerns our regular finances. Since our increased offertory support program a year ago, we have been doing well. I just want to offer everyone a great big thank you. We have a finance statement for the past fiscal year in today's bulletin. The extra money that put us ahead this year will help with our painting the church and with making up for the losses we

suffered in the past three years. I am immensely grateful for your generosity.

Finally, I want to say something about the painting. The painters were hoping to start with the choir loft and move forward, but scheduling with the scaffolding company has run into a few snags, so until we get more scaffolding up the painters have been working on some of the lower walls. You can see some difference in the two transepts. All of the pews that have to be taken up to make room for scaffolding will be returned, except for the six that have been permanently removed to provide a gathering space in the back of church. It has become more popular to have funeral visitations in church before the funeral and we do not have enough room to accommodate many people with our small vestibule. Also, in bad weather, sometimes after a Mass or a wedding people may want to stay and visit for several minutes. When I came to St. Boniface 20 years ago, I asked people to remain silent before Mass for those who want to pray and to feel free to visit if they wanted to stay afterwards. People have been very considerate about keeping that practice and I am grateful.

I discovered a week ago that the church is actually far dirtier than I was aware. I guess I shouldn't be surprised after 50 years with candles constantly burning and sending their carbon up into the air. One of the workers recently took a ladder up to the gold leaf dome, just to check it out. It is gold leaf. He took a dozen or so dry cotton balls and just rubbed it over the gold. This is what he got. (show very blackened cotton balls) Then he went over the spot with a dry cleaning sponge and got more dirt. It's an expensive project but our church is a sacred place to be honored and respected and it is our place to pray each day the greatest prayer we have.

There is one other thing. A few weeks ago a very generous parishioner called to make an offer. This parishioner said if we had a capital campaign for the church painting, that person would match every dollar that was donated up to \$50,000 dollars. You will receive a letter about this matching gift this week. I could not let this opportunity slip by. I hope our parishioners can come up with \$50,000 (or more), then (somewhat like the loaves and fishes on a smaller scale), it will be multiplied and we will receive an additional \$50,000 to help us out. When I first heard about this offer, I told a friend of mine and within a day he gave me a check for \$5000. So, I just need nine more people like that. Please, I ask you if you would read carefully the letter I am sending and consider helping us this way.