

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

July 11, 2010

INTRODUCTION - Deut 30, 10-14; Colossians 1, 15-20; Luke 10, 25-37

The Book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons addressed to the people of Israel by Moses right before they were to enter the Promised Land. Moses had led them from the slavery of Egypt and was with them for many years as they traveled through the Sinai desert. Moses knew he would die before the people could enter their Promised Land, so he is in a sense giving them some last words of wisdom before he would have to leave them. Today's first reading begins with an incomplete sentence: "If only you would heed the voice of the Lord..." The sentence implies that God would bless them greatly "if only they would heed the voice of the Lord..." The passage goes on to stress that people do not have to guess what God wants of them. God has been very clear as to how he wants us to live. It's no hidden mystery. This concept connects with today's gospel, the story of the good Samaritan. The story is depicted in our stained glass window by the ramp to the parking lot. When a scholar of the law asked Jesus what God wants of us, Jesus' reply to the man shows that the man already knew the answer to his question. Almost instinctively, we all know what God wants of all of us. Knowing it is not the problem, but living it is.

HOMILY - I think most of you know I've been on a tour to Rome to see our new Archbishop receive the pallium. I hear you've prayed for me and I'm grateful. Although there was an explanation of the pallium in the Catholic Telegraph, not everyone gets the Telegraph, so I would like to explain it. A pallium is a somewhat circular strip of white cloth made of lambs wool that fits over the archbishop's head with a piece of the same cloth hanging about seven inches down the front and the back. Only the pope and archbishops wear the pallium, and they wear it over their vestments when they are celebrating Mass. It is a sign that the archbishop is in union with the pope. It is made out of lamb's wool that has been blessed, and it reminds a person of the good shepherd that found the one sheep that was lost and carried it back to the sheepfold on his shoulders. The Archbishop is our chief shepherd who carries on his shoulders the spiritual responsibility for this Archdiocese.

On Monday evening, before the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, which is a holy day and a holiday in Rome, we went to the residence of the US ambassador to the Vatican for a little reception for the three archbishops from the United States who were to receive the pallium. After the reception, we went to St. Paul's outside the Wall where the Holy Father had Evening Prayer. I was in Rome many years ago, but it was the first time I ever saw the pope in real life and not just in pictures or on TV. St. Boniface Church has many features similar to St. Paul's in Rome and while there I enjoyed noticing a number of similarities. The next day, on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Holy Father conferred the pallium on 38 archbishops at St. Peter's Basilica. I got to see the Holy Father fairly close up as he processed in. He looked very joyful and stopped to shake hands with some of the children in the church. The third time I saw him was in a general audience in St. Peter's square. We had really good seats, but to get them we had to be two hours early. A lot of people had umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun. They were

told to fold up their umbrellas when the pope came in so they didn't block the view of people behind them, and they did. But when all the bishops and cardinals came in, they sat in front of us and the first thing they did was put up their umbrellas. There is a good picture of them in the Telegraph holding up their umbrellas. On the other days of the week, we got to say Mass in some important Basilicas, with the five priests on the tour concelebrating with the Archbishop. I felt honored to get to preach to the group at St. John Lateran, which is considered the cathedral of Rome, a church built originally by Constantine after he ended the persecution of Christians.

We saw a lot of other places and had a lot of other experiences I could talk about, including the visit of a classmate from seminary days who took an all-night train from Venice to come to Rome so we could visit for a few hours (which meant a lot to me). But lest I bore you with more travelogue, I will switch gears here with a quotation from a sermon by St. Augustine. It was given on the occasion of the dedication of a Church (perhaps on the feast of the solemnity of the dedication of St. John Lateran which we celebrate every year in November). Augustine said, "what was done here, as these walls were rising, is reproduced when we bring together those who believe in Christ. For, by believing, they are hewn out, as it were from mountains and forests, like stones and timber. Believers are as it were shaped, squared and planed by the hands of the workers and artisans through baptism, instruction and Eucharist. Nevertheless, they do not make a house for the Lord until they are fitted together through love."

This brings us to the gospel message for today: love. It is the basic law on which all law is built: love for God and love for one another. We are here today out of love, following Jesus' command at the Last Supper that we do this in memory of him. We show our love for God also through prayer (following the example Jesus gave us) and through keeping his commandments for he told us: "if you love me you will keep my commandments." To encourage us to love one another, in addition to the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke's gospel, he told us in Matthew's gospel: "what you do to the least of my brothers and sisters you do for me." If we need further explanation of what love is, St. Paul expresses it so beautifully in I Corinthians, chapter 13: love is patient, love is kind...etc. This is probably the most well know part of any of the thirteen letters attributed to St. Paul. Notice when the Scriptures talk about love, they don't refer to warm, fuzzy feelings, (which may or may not occur in conjunction with love), but in talking of love, the Scriptures talk about what we do to honor God and to care for one another. Today's gospel message on love is a lifetime task. With inspiration from Jesus, who has shown us great love, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to grow in God's love. Amen.

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

July 18, 2010

INTRODUCTION: (Genesis 18, 1-10; Colossians 1, 24-28; Luke 10, 38-42) We never know when God might surprise us and pay us a visit. Sometimes God's visits come with good ideas or with a strong awareness that we're not alone. Sometimes they come with a deep sense of peace or with a twinge of conscience. Sometimes they come when we meet a holy person or a

person who is in desperate need of our help. And, of course, God comes to visit us as our life in this world reaches its end.

Our first reading is about Abraham who welcomes three strangers. It's hard to picture Abraham preparing such a lavish banquet for his guests with such energy and agility since the previous chapter had just told us Abraham was 100 years old. I have to wonder what kind of vitamins he was taking. Abraham didn't realize at first that it was God whom he was entertaining. God had come to tell him that his lifelong desire that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a son would finally be fulfilled. As God assured Abraham of this blessing, Abraham could see that their roles were reversed. Suddenly, Abraham was not the prosperous desert chieftain providing hospitality to three hungry travelers. He was simply a creature of God receiving a blessing from his Creator. Our first reading prepares us for the story of Martha and Mary (illustrated by our stained glass window) as these two sisters are visited by the One who could give them every blessing and the word of life.

HOMILY: Not so long ago I had a conversation with a friend. He has been a good Catholic all his life. We were talking about prayer. I shared with him one of the ways that I pray that has been a great support to me ever since I was a young child. I said I just imagine as if our Lord were sitting at a table with me or out walking with me and we were talking. I talk about anything that's on my mind just as if I could really see him - for I do believe he is really with me all the time. From the expression on my friend's face, I could see this was the first time an idea like that had ever crossed his mind. He said, "I don't know what I would say if our Lord showed up at my home and just wanted to visit for a little while." I said "Just talk with him like you would with anyone who is a good friend." I suggested he try it for ten minutes a day. I haven't heard how it's working with him, but I wonder how many other believers would feel comfortable praying that way. There are many other forms of prayer, of course, reading Scripture, the rosary, praying out of a prayer book, meditating on a spiritual theme, reading about the saints, holy hours before the Blessed Sacrament, praying the psalms and especially the Eucharist which is the summit of all our prayer. But this type of informal prayer, just sitting and talking things over with our Lord, or just sitting quietly in his presence has been a real blessing for me. I do it every day, whether I feel like it or not, and that's the recommendation of all spiritual writers, and it's always something good. In the original version of the gospel, in Greek, that's what Jesus said about Mary sitting at his feet: "she has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her."

In last week's gospel, a Jewish leader asked Jesus a question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The story of the Good Samaritan about love of neighbor gave us Jesus' answer. It is quite possible that St. Luke intends today's story about Martha and Mary as a further answer to that question. The Christian life is about doing good and being good, but it is also about having a close relationship with God. "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." This was the entire answer to the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

It's obvious Martha and Mary were on very good terms with Jesus. Although Luke doesn't tell us, Martha and Mary lived in Bethany, just under two miles outside of Jerusalem. It's most likely

the place where Jesus stayed when he came to Jerusalem for important feasts - for on such feasts Jerusalem was packed with visitors and lodgings were scarce. You can just imagine Jesus smiling as he says: "Martha, Martha..." It is a friendly response. In telling her "one thing" is important, it does not imply that the practical necessities of life, such as eating and drinking were not important. It's more that Martha, the older sister, who wanted all her guests to be well taken care of, was troubled over too many things, too many things to take some time just to listen to our Lord and to speak with him. Martha was doing a good thing, but it was time to slow down and hear the word of life. It's hard to imagine that Mary, whom we know from John's gospel, deeply loved Jesus, would have shirked her duty and left the whole burden of being hospitable to her sister. I think Martha imagined there was a great deal more to be done than was really needed. Certainly Jesus seems to have implied as much.

The story has a lot to tell us about our busy lives today. We are to do good, but one of the good things we are to do is to slow down and hear the word of life - which we are doing at this time. So, thank you for being here today. Amen.