

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle
July 7, 2013

INTRODUCTION: *Isaiah 66, 10-14; Gal. 6, 14-18; Lk. 10, 1-12. 17-20)*

Our first reading deals with a time in Jewish history right after the Babylonian exile. After the Jews had been slaves and exiles for 50 years, they were allowed to return home. They didn't return all at once. What they found when they did return was discouraging and depressing. Their cities, lands and homes were in ruins. God encouraged them with messages of comfort and hope through the prophet Isaiah. He assured them he did not bring them home from exile to abandon them. Jerusalem would be like a mother once again, nurturing them and caring for them. They must rejoice. They will enjoy prosperity once more. The psalm refrain echoes this call to rejoice.

HOMILY: I want to start off asking you to take a couple of deep breaths. That's a good way to relax, but don't fall asleep yet. Now take a deep breath and hold it. Keep holding as long as you can. Few people can do it for longer than a minute. Now you can let it out. We know that it is normal for us to have to breathe in and breathe out. I wanted you to do this to illustrate that this is the way our faith works too. We breathe in all that God has for us, in prayer, in Scripture, in the sacraments, in support from fellow believers and in the many ways God helps us. But we need to breathe out the love and mercy of God and be willing to share our faith with others. The gospel tells us Jesus gathered together 72 disciples and sent them out. He had the Apostles, but the 12 of them were not enough for what he wanted to do. He remarked the harvest is abundant but the laborers are few. (*idea came from the June, 2013 publication of The Word Among Us.*) We pray for vocations at every Mass, but even if we have twice as many priests or religious, we would need you. How can you breathe out God's love and mercy? First through prayer, prayer for those no longer going to Church and also that our Church might grow through membership. We don't have to go out and preach on the street corner, but we can witness effectively through sharing how God has blessed us personally. Some people may think you are a little weird if you do that; they may turn their back on you; they may point out to you all the faults the Church has or faults you may have. Jesus said to the 72, "I am sending you like lambs among wolves." He could see he was being rejected and he knew his followers would be too. St. Luke's community (for whom Luke wrote his gospel 50 years later) was probably experiencing the same rejection and that's why Luke quotes Jesus here. Apparently the 72 on this mission didn't run into hardly any wolves who wanted to tear them apart because they came back rejoicing and telling of their successes. It wouldn't always be that way, unfortunately. There were lots of martyrs in the early Church.

We live in a Country where we should be able to practice our religion freely. But there are those who want to put limits on the exercise of our faith. We just ended a two week period of prayer for religious freedom. The bishops called for a holy hour once a month (we have two a week), they called for a daily rosary and prayers at Mass. They encourage sacrifice such as giving up meat on Fridays. For what purpose are we praying for religious freedom? Against our conscience, our government wants us to pay

not only for contraceptives but also for abortion inducing drugs. When the Church asked for an exemption to this mandate, the government decided who is religious enough to be granted an exemption. Some Catholic social services in other areas of our nation have had to give up their work with adoptions and foster care because, in the conscience of the Catholic social service agencies, a child should be placed in a stable family where there is a mother and father who are married to one another. The government put them out of the adoption and foster care business. There are more things; however, I talked about these issues and others this past July 4th, and I don't want to be repetitious. This is another area where we can witness to our faith. We can let our legislators know what we think about the restrictions the government desires to put on our freedom of religion. It is our right to voice our opinion and if enough people speak up, they pay attention.

One last item I want to mention. After Mass today, we will have the anointing of the sick. Jesus healed the sick and in today's gospel he sent the 72 out to exorcise demons and to heal the sick. In this way they would proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God, a kingdom in which there would be no more suffering, no more evil, no more sickness and death. Jesus is calling us to eternal life with him. He depends on us to get the word out. Amen.

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle July 14, 2013

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. 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 door on the Blessed Virgin side. 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; living it is.

HOMILY - A scholar of the law asked Jesus a question about what God expects of us: "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life." In other places in the Scriptures, Jesus himself always answered this question. Perhaps on this occasion, Jesus understood the person asking the question knew the answer, so Jesus asked him what the law said. The answer the lawyer gave to his own question is an answer we all know - to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. The part

about loving our neighbor is not just a Jewish law; it is what all religions believe in. It is called the golden rule: “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

In the time of Jesus, love of neighbor applied only to fellow Israelites. Eventually this law of love was extended also to foreigners living in Israel (Deut 10,19) but not to others. Jesus, who came to save all people, gave an interpretation to this commandment of love that is as broad as possible: it extends even to loving one’s enemies. (Mt. 6,43 ff) Indeed, his story about the Good Samaritan illustrated this. To the Jewish mind, no Samaritan was good. There was hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans that went back for hundreds of years. This is an example of their mutual hostility. Jews traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem would normally avoid Samaria which was right between both places. They would bypass Samaria by crossing the Jordan river and then going into the area that is today the country of Jordan. They would then go south and cross the river again to go thru Jericho to make the 18 mile long climb up to Jerusalem. It surely added a day or two to their trip. This road to Jerusalem ascended from 770 feet below sea level to 2500 feet above and it was a treacherous and dangerous road. It was on this road between Jericho and Jerusalem that our story of the Good Samaritan takes place.

We have become familiar and comfortable with this story of Jesus, but it would have shocked the people of Jesus’ time who heard it. If we were to retell the story to ourselves today, we would have to change the characters: for example, the first person who passed the victim of violence would be a bishop, then the next person would be a priest, and finally the third person, who helped the victim, would be a member of the Moslem Brotherhood. That puts a different light on the story doesn’t it?

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 it is we do to honor and obey God and to care for one another. The last line of the gospel tells us to “go and do likewise!” 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 21, 2013

INTRODUCTION: (*Genesis 18, 1-10; Colossians 1, 24-28; Luke 10, 38-42*) God is always with us, but there are those times when God’s presence becomes tangible. It’s always a surprise when it happens. Sometimes God’s visits come in the form of a good idea 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. 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. 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. 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 Jesus – whom they had not yet come to know was the Son of God, the giver of every blessing, and the One who spoke words of eternal life.

HOMILY: I would like to begin with last week's gospel. It is connected with today's. If you will recall, a scholar in the Jewish law asked Jesus a question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Could there be a more important question in our lives than this one? And yet, it's a question a lot of people in our society do not seem to have much concern. Somehow many people figure we are all going to be saved in the end, no matter how we've lived. That's not the message we get from the gospel. Once Jesus was asked: "Lord, will only a few be saved?" Jesus answered: "strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able." (*Lk. 13,23-24*). We would be considering Jesus a fool or a liar if we did not take seriously the many parables Jesus spoke regarding the importance of being ready to enter God's kingdom.

To get the answer to the question: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked the scholar in Jewish law what he thought was the answer. Of course, the scholar answered correctly: to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Then he asked Jesus for a definition of neighbor, which led into the parable of the Good Samaritan.

I feel sure that St. Luke put today's gospel right after the story about the Good Samaritan for a reason. It is an illustration of the first and greatest commandment: to love God with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength. The story of Martha and Mary does not imply that Martha did not love God, while Mary did. Martha loved God too. She was demonstrating her love by getting a big meal together for Jesus and the twelve apostles. But Jesus told her, "you are busy (the Greek word also means "distracted") about many things." While the gospel of the good Samaritan tells us to care about one another (which is what Martha was doing), Jesus tells us sometimes we have to stop being busy and give him our undivided attention (and that is what Mary was doing). Another word for that is "prayer." In other words, we need to pray as well as do good works to be a good disciple.

Whenever most people think of prayer, they think of "saying prayers." That is a good way to pray, but we can also pray by listening, thinking about what Christ has taught us, or just being with Christ and giving him our attention without saying or thinking anything. That's what Mary was doing. That's what Jesus was suggesting to Martha she try doing and to stop being so busy all the time. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things (meaning too many things) there is need of only one thing." The story is telling us that in our busy lives, we need to make some time to spend with God.

We do call Sunday the Lord's Day and that's why we are here. Thank you for making time for God today. These days, on the Lord's Day, the Lord is fortunate to get even a minute's thought from some people. Fulfilling our Sunday obligation is the first and most important way we are to express our total love of God for the Mass is the greatest prayer we have, the most perfect act of worship we can offer God. In my own spiritual life, besides the Mass and the Divine Office which I say every day and my weekly holy hour. I mention these things simply as an illustration of the various ways we can pray. I enjoy studying the Scriptures daily, I say the rosary frequently, and every day I just sit quietly in church for a while. I talk to God about whatever comes to my mind, or I just listen for him to speak. Some people pray through singing hymns or the psalms. I assure you my daily prayers have been a great blessing for me throughout my life. I believe the hardest thing about prayer is making time for it. When I feel as if I'm too busy to pray, I always say to myself: if you don't schedule it in, you schedule it out. So I schedule it in. I often recommend that people who do not go to Mass on Sundays should sit down and pray for an hour so they stay in touch with God. Prayer is as important for our relationship with God as communication is for our relationships with one another. Amen.

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle July 28, 2013

INTRODUCTION We heard last Sunday about Abraham having a surprise visit from three strangers. Abraham provided a feast for them and as it turned out one of the three visitors was God himself. God revealed he was greatly displeased with two cities near the Dead Sea, Sodom and Gomorrah, and he invited Abraham to go with him as he went to visit them. Abraham realized God was about to severely punish those cities for their depravity and immorality, and he shows his concern because his nephew, Lot, lived in Sodom. Notice the comfortable, yet respectful, familiarity that existed between God and Abraham.

HOMILY: Psychologically, we often relate to God, our Father in heaven, in ways that are similar to the ways we related to our father here on earth. My father was a good provider, and I think that has served to help me trust in God as a good provider, but my father was not like God in encouraging me to keep on asking if I wanted something. I had a strict father and I don't know how many times I heard him say: "I told you once and I don't want to tell you again: NO, you can't do this or you can't have that." When he said NO he meant it and don't dare ask again. In today's gospel, Jesus tells us to persist in asking. It's not because God doesn't know what we want or need, or he's too busy to care about our needs right now, but our persistence helps to create a dialogue and build a relationship with him. Every prayer will be heard, and every prayer will bring us a blessing, even if it's not the exact thing we want. If we don't get the exact thing we want, it means he has something better in mind. No prayer is ever be wasted. One of the things all the saints stress is that we should never quit praying, even when we're not in the mood, because that's when our relationship with God and our faith grow deeper. Amen.