

2nd Sunday of Lent - B Cycle
March 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION: Last week we heard about God's covenant with Noah; God promised he would never again cause a flood that would destroy all life on earth. The sign of that covenant is the rainbow. Sometime roughly 1750 years before Christ, God entered into another important covenant with a person named Abram. God promised Abram numerous blessings and many descendants. In return, God asked Abram simply to trust him. Today we hear how Abram (whose name has by now been changed to Abraham) remained trusting in a most difficult situation. By the way, Mt. Moriah is right in the center of Jerusalem where the Dome of the Rock now stands. That's the same place where Solomon built the Temple.

HOMILY: Roughly the first half of St. Mark's gospel tells us of Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing in Galilee. Before Jesus began his ministry, however, he was baptized by John the Baptist. At Jesus' baptism the Spirit came down upon him like a dove and a voice came from the heavens which said: "you are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." As we heard in last Sunday's gospel, immediately the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for 40 days.

Today's gospel is from chapter nine in St. Mark and we are just a little past the half way point in Mark. Mark is preparing to tell us about Jesus' final days and his suffering and death. At the beginning of his gospel, we hear God the Father speak out about his beloved Son. On this occasion Jesus took his three closest apostles up to the top of Mt. Tabor, a mountain about 2000 feet high, and while there, Jesus' appearance began to change. The apostles saw Jesus' true identity and the glory that was always hidden by his human flesh. As before, the voice of the heavenly Father speaks: "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." The three apostles were terrified and yet this ecstatic moment prompted them to want to pitch tents so they could remain there for a while - if not permanently.

It was not to be. Jesus' ministry was not finished, and it would not be finished until after his death and resurrection. Jesus told them not to tell anyone about this vision until after he had risen from the dead.

Like the apostles, we prefer to picture Jesus in glory, but we can't forget Jesus is still our God even as he was hanging on the cross in extreme agony. Our God could not suffer in his divinity, so he took on our human nature to share our suffering and so he could give his life for us. We must meet our God under both aspects - as our suffering Lord and as our glorified Lord. It is in meeting him under both aspects that we are more able to deal with the suffering that comes our way in our journey through life. Coming to Mass each week keeps us in touch with Jesus' sacrifice of his body and blood and it gives us the promise of future glory. Lent too can help us continue to be aware of what Jesus did for us. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Lent - B Cycle **March 8, 2015**

INTRODUCTION: [*Exodus 20, 1-17; I Cor. 1, 22-25; John 2, 13-25*] Covenant is a theme that keeps recurring in our first reading these Sundays of Lent. The first Sunday of Lent, we hear about God's covenant with Noah. Last Sunday we heard about God's covenant with Abraham and how Abraham's trust in God was tested when he heard God tell him to sacrifice his son. Today, the third Sunday of Lent, we hear about God's covenant with his people as they traveled under the leadership of Moses from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Typically a covenant had two parts, what each party to the covenant promised they would do for one another. God, for his part of the covenant, had promised his people liberty, land, prosperity and his special care and love. Today's first reading tells us what God expected of his people in return.

HOMILY: Fortunately, I do not have to talk about money very often. Typically, once a year I inform the parish how we are doing financially: whether we are doing well or falling short. Today is entirely different. I'm not going to talk about how we as a parish are doing, but how we as an Archdiocese are doing. It is not just how we have done the past year, but how we hope to be doing years from now. I could call my topic an investment in the future: will Catholic schools still be around, will we have enough money to support our many retired priests, will we be able to keep the seminary going and will we be able to really reach out to the poor and help them to have enough to eat and provide programs for them to improve their lives. Add all this up, and this is a big endeavor. Our Archbishop is taking his responsibilities seriously and is responding to some of the needs we have as an archdiocese. We do have to realize that the Church is not just St. Boniface in Northside, but it is world-wide. Sometimes we take up collections for foreign missions, for retired religious, for the Holy Land, for the charitable work of the Holy Father, for respect of life, etc. These special collections remind us of the universality of the Church. Our focus today though is on the southwest corner of Ohio where there are almost a half million Catholics living in cities like Piqua, Sidney, Troy, Minster, Springfield, Dayton, Hamilton, Hillsboro, Lebanon, and especially Cincinnati. The Archbishop is responsible for all of this and is asking for our help. He is very shrewd financially and I trust his judgment 100%.

The last time we had a big, archdiocesan drive like this one was when I graduated from high school – back in 1955, about 60 years ago. At that time Archbishop Alter was the Archbishop and he was interested mainly in building a few high schools. It was an investment that is still paying dividends. So we are talking about serious money today.

It hasn't escaped me that there is something ironic about reading the gospel about Jesus cleansing the Temple and my asking for a significant donation from each of our parishioners. I might comment that there were many abuses at the time of Jesus regarding Temple worship. We read that Jesus drove noisy and messy large animals out of the Temple like sheep and oxen. Matthew tells us the Temple had been turned into a den of thieves. The Jewish historian Josephus informs us that the High Priest, who no doubt benefitted from all these dealings, was "the great procurer of money." It is

possible too that Jesus' action indicated that the time had come for the Jews to no longer sacrifice animals for Jesus was about the offer the perfect sacrifice. There was also the belief that the Messiah would build a new Temple and this could have been the meaning of this prophetic act of Jesus. At any event, until Jesus teaches us how to multiply loaves and fishes and how to change water into wine, we're going to need money or its equivalent in order to do the Lord's work and to survive.

So I wish to talk for a few minutes about the One Faith, One Hope, One Love capital campaign. Every church in the Archdiocese is participating, and every church will attempt to invite each of its parishioners to participate. The overall goal for the whole Archdiocese is \$130 million. Our goal at St. Boniface is \$570 thousand. This figure is computed from what people give in the collection on Sundays. I told a friend that's how it was figured and he responded, "I'm glad I didn't give very much in the collection." I'm not recommending that attitude to anyone. Two months ago when I was getting started organizing this campaign, \$570 thousand seemed impossible, but since then, after contacting a couple of dozen people, we already have pledges totaling about \$266 thousand. We're already almost half way there. I think our goal is doable and it is very heartening to me that our people have started off being so supportive.

I briefly touched on the purposes of the campaign earlier. I want to expand on that a little more. A couple of weeks ago, you received in the bulletin a pie chart like this. You were probably wondering what it was. Well, now you know. It indicates that half of the campaign money will go toward Catholic schools. One of the most important jobs of the Church is to teach and Catholic schools have been an effective way to do that. A percent of the campaign will go toward the seminary and toward recruiting vocations. Another percent will help provide funds for our retired diocesan priests, while another percent goes for helping the poor through Catholic charities and social services. Lastly, 20% of the funds will be returned to our parish, which the Parish Council thought could best be spent to enlarge our lower parking lot. That means if we meet our goal of \$570 thousand, over \$100 thousand will come back to St. Boniface. I think it's obvious that any Church without adequate parking is bound to lose parishioners.

This Thursday, if we don't have snow, we will have a meeting that will expand a lot more on each of these items. The meeting will be for those who might be able to help us contact other parishioners, but if you come to the meeting you will save yourself having to be called on personally, to have someone explain the program to you. If you go to the meeting and you are contacted you can say I went to the meeting and \$XXX is what I pledge and fill out a pledge card.

I think this is enough said for now. I hope everyone will join me in supporting this very important program for the good of the Archdiocese and for the good of our Church. Thank you for your patient listening.

4th Sunday of Lent - B Cycle

March 15, 2015

INTRODUCTION: [2 Chronicles 36, 14-16.19-23; Eph. 2, 4-10; John 3, 14-21] Last Sunday we heard about God's covenant with his people as they traveled with Moses from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. God promised his people many blessings and his special love and in return they were to keep his Law, especially the part of the Law we call "The Ten Commandments." The Jewish historian who wrote the book of Chronicles gives us a summary of over seven centuries of infidelities on the part of God's people to their covenant. The consequences of their infidelity led to untold disaster for the nation, but God would not let them be totally destroyed. Just to help you visualize this better, the Babylonians who practically destroyed them came out of modern day Iraq. The Persians who restored them to their land came out of Iran. Our psalm refrain is the lament of God's people as they suffered captivity in Babylon. Next week we will hear Jeremiah promise that God would make a new covenant with his people since the people observed the old one so poorly. We celebrate and renew God's new covenant as always as we celebrate the Eucharist today.

HOMILY: St. John's gospel is the only gospel that mentions Nicodemus. We just heard about him today at the beginning of John's gospel. He was a Pharisee and a Jewish religious leader, which implies he was one of the 71 members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme ruling council of the Jews.

In the room off the vestibule in the back of church, we have a stained glass window picturing Nicodemus talking with Jesus. That room is usually referred to as the brides' room, but originally it was the baptistery. It is fitting that the stained glass window in the baptistery should picture Nicodemus because at their first meeting, Jesus told Nicodemus a person cannot enter God's kingdom unless they are born again of water and the Spirit, which is a reference to baptism.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was being practical, of course, for the supreme ruling council of the Jews had only hatred for Jesus. Nicodemus may have feared he would lose many of his good friends if he were caught having a normal conversation with Jesus. John's gospel is also speaking on a symbolic level. In telling us Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, John is telling us Nicodemus was far from having complete faith in Jesus. Since Jesus is the true light who gives light to all people, as John told us earlier in his gospel, Nicodemus hasn't found that light yet. He's still in the dark - only searching for the light.

Today's gospel is one of the most popular and beloved passages in the entire Bible: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3,15)

Too many people think that to believe in Jesus, all we have to do is say the words: “I believe in Jesus, or I believe he is the Son of God.” Believing in Jesus is much more than that. To believe in Jesus is to live the way he taught us; i.e., to live in his light. Any other way of living is to live in darkness. To believe in Jesus is to believe he has come down from heaven (Jn. 3,13) so he could teach us about heavenly things. To believe in Jesus is to believe he is our spiritual nourishment. He told us: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven” (Jn. 6, 35. 51); it is to believe that he is the “good shepherd” (Jn 10,11.14); that he is “the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11,25); that he is the “real vine” and we are branches who draw our life from him (Jn 15,1.5) and that he is “the way, the truth, and the life.” (Jn 14,6) To say I believe in Jesus is basically to turn our life over to God.

At this point in the gospel Nicodemus is still in the dark unable to grasp the spiritual lessons Jesus is trying to teach him. Nicodemus had a mind and heart that was seeking to know the truth and coming to Jesus was the best place to begin. Later in the gospel of John we hear about Nicodemus again. The supreme council of the Jews is discussing Jesus and Nicodemus argues that Jesus deserves a fair trial before he is condemned. Nicodemus was rebuffed for his remarks. The third time Nicodemus shows up is at Jesus’ burial. He came with 75 or 100 pounds of spices with which Jesus would be embalmed. At this point we see Nicodemus had moved beyond his fear and made a 100% commitment to Jesus, Even though he had watched Jesus die as a condemned criminal, he made this commitment without wavering. That took real faith. He could see in his heart that when Jesus was lifted up on the cross it was really Jesus being lifted up into glory. May our Lenten practices help us to grow in our faith and in our total commitment to Jesus. Amen.

5th Sunday of Lent - B Cycle

March 22, 2015

INTRODUCTION: [Jeremiah 31,31-35; Hebrews 5,7-9; John 12,20-33]

The prophet Jeremiah lived 600 years before Christ. He was sent by God on a mission of mercy to warn God’s people that they were living on the edge of a catastrophe. If they didn’t start following God’s ways, the Babylonians would invade their land and destroy them. Centuries of wanton idolatry, social injustice and even human sacrifice had seriously weakened the moral fiber of God’s people. God was telling them through the prophet Jeremiah how they could avoid disaster. Of course, they ignored Jeremiah and persecuted him for his message. Today’s first reading comes shortly before the Babylonian invasion. Centuries earlier, God had made a covenant with his people through Moses and the people continually violated it. In spite of their unfaithfulness, God still loved his people and he promised he would make a new covenant with them as the former one did not work out so well. Six hundred years later, Jesus used these

words, “new covenant” when he gave the cup of his blood to his disciples at the Last Supper. We renew that covenant with him each time we come to Mass.

HOMILY: The setting for today’s gospel is that Jesus is in Jerusalem. It is springtime, just a few days before the Jewish Passover. In just a few days, Judas will betray Jesus and Jesus will be arrested, condemned and put to death. When some Greeks showed up asking to “see” Jesus (another way of saying they wanted some time with him), Jesus knew that his ministry exclusively among the Jewish people had come to an end, that his death was imminent and it was time for the Apostles to go outside the Jewish world and to preach the gospel of God’s love to everyone. Jesus uses the word “hour” quite often in John’s gospel. His “hour” always referred to his death, resurrection and his return to the Father. Jesus says, the “hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (Jn. 12, 23)

Always at this time of year, there is someone who asks “Why did Jesus have to die?” Philosophers, theologians and saints have puzzled over the answer to these questions. Of course, I have always wondered why it had to happen. I’ll tell you how I answered it to my own satisfaction, but I’m sure there is much more to it than what I could figure out. I believe that Jesus’ death was the consequence of his ministry of fighting against evil wherever or whenever he saw it. In his fight against evil, he had to buck up against the powerful Jewish leaders, he had to teach people to forgive, to love, to help the poor, to be pure, not to be prejudiced - in brief, to put God’s will above their own wants and desires. If Jesus tried to save his life and run away and hide, his whole ministry would die, his apostles would go back to fishing or whatever they were occupied with before he called them. All the work he did, all his teaching would be forgotten. Maybe if he taught and preached for 45 years like the Buddha, or 40 years like Moses, or 22 years like Mohammed, some people would have remembered some of what he said or did, but Jesus’ public ministry was for only three years. So he knew that in preaching the message of God’s love that the Father had sent him to preach, he had to remain faithful to his work until the end. Seeing it that way helps me see why Jesus had to die. Jesus knew, moreover, that his work would not end with his death. Did he not say, “destroy this temple (meaning his body) and in three days I will raise it up”? He uses two images in today’s gospel to tell us his death would bear much fruit and it would save all who would believe in him.

Jesus said his death would be like a seed that is planted. Think what happens when a seed is planted. It springs to life and produces many more seeds like itself. Jesus’ death and resurrection would form the beginning of the Christian community. Many more people would be filled with his spirit, his attitude of love and obedience for God the Father, and his love for others.

There is another image Jesus uses in today’s gospel to explain his death. It is an image borrowed from the Old Testament. I would like to spend a moment explaining it because I think most people are unfamiliar with it. While the Jews were traveling with Moses after leaving Egypt, they came across an area infested with seraph serpents. Seraph means fiery, which implies that their bite must have been very painful. Many

Jews died from the serpents' poisonous bite. The people saw this as punishment from God for their constant complaining, and they came to Moses and asked him to pray for their forgiveness. Moses did and God told him to fabricate a bronze serpent and put it up on a staff. If anyone was bitten by a serpent all they had to do was to look at the bronze serpent and they would be healed. (Numbers 21, 6-9) Jesus' death, resurrection and return to the Father would be a lifting up, meaning both his physical lifting up on the cross and his glorification at the right hand of the Father. This lifting up in death and glory would draw all people to him - at least all people who turn to him in faith, and they will be saved. This is the third time Jesus uses this image in John's gospel.

Those who see death as the end of everything are missing a very important teaching as we hear Jesus talk about his own death which is a source of life and salvation for those who believe in him. All this ties in with our first reading about a new covenant, for it is in his blood that Jesus makes a covenant with us, calling us to be faithful to him as he promises eternal life and salvation. Amen.

Passion Sunday – B cycle

March 29, 2015

INTRODUCTION: Five hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah tells us about a person who is called God's Servant. We do not have the name of this Servant, but from four passages, from brief to very lengthy, we have been given much information **about** the Servant. To quickly summarize what we are told, the Servant faithfully followed God's call to bring justice to the earth and light to the nations. It was a call that would bring great suffering to the Servant - inflicted upon him by the people he came to help. These Servant passages marvelously describe Jesus which makes it especially amazing that they were composed so many years before Jesus was born. Today's first reading is the first part of the third Servant Song. The first reading is followed by Psalm 22, a meditation on the sufferings of a just person. In this Psalm Jesus prayed as he hung on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me."

HOMILY: I'm sure all of us were horrified by the crash of the Germanwings aircraft this week. The latest explanation is that it was a deliberate crash by the co-pilot, committing suicide and taking 150 others with him. If that is true, this is more than suicide, which in itself is not right. What the Germanwings' crash demonstrates was pure evil.

It demonstrates that there are those who come into this world who bring great pain and suffering others. Then there are those who are just the opposite. They are a source of favors and blessings to those they associate with, even sometimes to the point of sacrificing their own desires and comfort for the good of another. Parents know what I'm talking about. Good parents do it all the time.

In our first reading today, we hear about God's Servant who sacrificed and who was even persecuted because he or she dedicated their life to serving others. Then there was Jesus. He is the ultimate example of what it means to love others. He could heal the sick, raise the dead, miraculously feed a huge crowd with one little boy's lunch. He would teach people the way of God, and he was persecuted for it – even to death.

This week is Holy Week. One of our teachers in school asked me what did Jesus do between Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday. My answer was that each day he came to the Temple and **taught**. At night he stayed roughly a mile away from Jerusalem in Bethany, across the Kidron Valley. I encourage you to come to our Holy Week services. If you cannot, perhaps you can spend some time reading the gospels. Read about the Last Supper and the crucifixion of Jesus. Or read about Jesus' teachings and let Jesus teach you. I might even humbly suggest reading my homily book where I have other homilies about Holy Week. They are sitting on the radiators – and they are free. Any of this reading will connect you more with the spirit of this week. Amen.