

Christmas, 2021

No Room at the Inn – Tina Donahue

Wallace Purling was nine that year and only in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Most people in town knew that he had difficulty keeping up. He was big and clumsy, slow in movement and mind. Still, Wally was well liked by the other children in his class, though the boys had trouble hiding their irritation with him when Wally asked to play ball with them.

Most often they'd find a way to keep him out, but Wally would hang around anyway – just hoping. He was a helpful boy, willing and smiling, and the natural protector of the underdog. When the older boys chased the younger ones away, it was always Wally who said, "Can't they stay? They're no bother."

Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas pageant that year, but the play's director assigned him a more important role. The inn-keeper did not have many lines, and Wally's size would make his refusal of lodging more forceful to Joe

The usual large audience gathered for the town's yearly extravaganza. Wallace stood in the wings, watching with fascination. THEN JOSEPH APPEARED – slowly, tenderly guiding Mary – and knocked hard on the wooden door set into the painted backdrop.

**"What do you want?"** Wally the innkeeper said brusquely, swinging open the door.

"We seek lodging," Joseph answered.

**"Seek it elsewhere,"** Wally looked straight ahead vigorously. **"The inn is filled."**

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are weary."

Wally looked properly stern & said, **"There is no room in this inn for you."**

Joseph said: "Please good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child. Surely, you must have some small corner for her to rest?"

(NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WALLACE, THE INNKEEPER, LOOKED DOWN AT MARY. THERE WAS A LONG PAUSE, LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE THE AUDIENCE TENSE WITH EMBARRASSMENT.)

"No, be gone!" the prompter whispered from the wings.

**"No!"** Wally repeated. **"Be gone!"**

Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary. Mary laid her head upon her husband's shoulder, and the two of them started to move away. Wally stood in the doorway, watching the forlorn couple. His mouth was open, his brow creased with concern, his eyes filling with tears. **And suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all the others.**

"Don't go, Joseph," Wally called out. "Bring Mary back." Wallace Purling broke into a bright smile, "You can have my room." A few people thought the pageant had been ruined. Most considered it the best pageant ever.

The good news is that God has chosen to be one with us...to be in our lives: Emmanuel. Born in a guest stable, he gives himself to us in another guest room at his Last Supper. We share his presence, this Word and Eucharist, so that awe can **share** in turn the inns of our lives. Come, let us adore him and follow him with our service to those who knock on our door every day.

## Feast of the Holy Family, 2021-12-24

A number of years ago, I had finished up with the 10am Mass at St. Mary, and after greeting everybody, I noticed a small boy wandering around. I called him over and asked, "Did they forget you?" He nodded yes. I said, "I bet they'll be back soon." So we sat on the front steps of St. Mary, talked a bit and waited, and, sure enough in a few minutes, one of the family vehicles approached. A concerned mother quickly hopped out of the van, hugged her son, said she was sorry, and they both jumped in.

Same thing happened to Carl's family. When he was coaching at New Orleans, they went to a parade, and lost track of their son, Tim, who had followed a float in a Mardi Gras parade. His parents were relieved when they found him down the road with a police officer, where no doubt his parents had told him to go when lost or in trouble.

No doubt Mary and Joseph were surprised to find Jesus in the temple, discussing the law with the teachers of the law. The feast of the Holy Family offers the opportunity to reflect on the mystery of family life. Every family and community share the perplexing, frustrating, demanding challenge Luke describes in today's gospel. Put most simply, Jesus wasn't going along with them every step of the way. It is a real story of family worry and conflict and is symbolic of all kinds of relationships. I'm sure Joseph and Mary were relieved at finding their child, like any family.

Having never been a parent myself, 2002 was a rude awakening for me personally. Mom and Dad needed assisted living and came to Carlyle. I became a caregiver for them. I started a journal the day we moved them, chronicling everything that happened the next 10 years...so I could remember. I quickly found out that I knew very little about seeing to their needs as they moved from assisted living to Carlyle Health Care.

Thanks to my brothers and their families' support and a number of you, my parish family, I started to learn WHAT IT MEANT TO BE FAMILY AND IN CHARGE IN SOME CASES. I've often said that I thought Mom and Dad were finished teaching me. But their most important lesson began when they moved here. It was a privilege for me, but I had much to learn. AND I also know that this experience made me a much better priest than I thought I could ever be. Words like family, compassion, caring, forgiveness, joy, sorrow, frustration, agony, prayer, ETC., all took on a deeper and REAL meaning for me.

Mom and Dad imaged God's presence for me from infant on up. And, in the end, they taught me the real demands involved in truly being family. I am lucky and blessed. So was Jesus blessed to have Mary and Joseph as parents. Not every family is so lucky or blessed. We give thanks to God for our families today as we continue to grow through the stages of family life. Let's all do our best to progress "steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and all." We are family...God who created us is good...all the time. Let us strive to be the same as we take care of each other.

## Mary, Mother of God

An old priest tells a young priest a story of Nazi oppression during WW II. The public was prevented from any evening gatherings...especially for Church. On Christmas Eve a large crowd of people decided to challenge this and process with candles lit to the Church for Midnight Mass. They were singing "O Come All You Faithful" and nearing the church building when they were stopped by guards. One of the soldiers grabbed a mother carrying a young child and put a knife to her throat. If the procession continued, he shouted, the young woman and child would die. There was a long pause in this moment...  
that was filled with tension.

After what seemed an eternity (but was only a few minutes) a lone voice began the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse, "Sing Choirs of Angels..." & all joined in. After what seemed another eternity, the guard loosened his grip, and the soldiers allowed the procession to move on.

The young priest asked the old: "Why would someone risk the mother & child's life by starting up the carol again? It is ridiculous." Replied the old priest, **"You don't understand the story...it was the young mother herself who began the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse."**

You know, life is full of tough situations. Mary is too often portrayed as one who simply says "yes" and everything works out according to God's plan. Mary was instead one tough woman...like many of the women we know.

She was a single, pregnant teenager...which meant that she was no doubt scorned by some folks. She was totally depended as a woman in a culture that was even more male-dominated than our own. Even though things didn't look good and life was tough, Mary said "yes" to the mystery of God working in her life. Blessed by God, Mary reminds all of us that we are blessed too. That is the good news: God is with us especially when we are powerless, ostracized, disenfranchised. Mary loved her Son to the death, even though some thought him crazy. So must we love her Son...by loving each other with a tough love...like that of a mother who knows when to say "no" and when to say "yes".

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and the hour of our death. Amen.

## Epiphany, 2021

These Magi, astrologers from the East, bring three gifts: gold, frankincense & myrrh. Historically and theologically the gift of gold was symbolic of Jesus' kingly humanity. Frankincense was interpreted as a symbol of Jesus' divinity. And myrrh, an ointment used in embalming the dead in Biblical times, predicts Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. This messiah, God & man, would save us through his own death...the wood of the crib is the wood of the cross.

G.K. Chesterton, Catholic, author, novelist & journalist of the 1920's and 30's retells the story with an essay on three Modern Wise Men. Chesterton writes that the three modern magi were in search of peace for the world and all humanity. And so, each magi collected a gift and together began their journey to a city of peace, a new Bethlehem. They wanted to enter this city and use their gifts as tickets for admission.

The first modern magi packed raw gold and suggested it could buy the pleasures of the earth. As the logic goes, if everyone is experiencing pleasure, there will be a greater peace between all people. This still resonates today with the hedonistic thoughts in our world. The second modern magi in Chesterton's rendition didn't bring frankincense, but instead brought the modern scent of chemistry. He suggested that his scent had the power to drug the mind, seed the soil, control the population...thereby insuring tranquility. The third modern magi brought myrrh (symbol of death) in the shape of a split atom. This was an instrument of death to be used against anyone who opposed the ways of peace. This threat would guarantee peace.

The re-telling continues with the three magi arriving at the palace of peace, where they meet St. Joseph at the front gate. Joseph refused them entrance into the new Bethlehem. The three magi protested and exclaimed, "What more could we possibly need to assure peace? We have the means to provide wealth and affluence (gold), to control nature and the environment (chemistry) and to destroy enemies of peace (split atom).

Joseph then quietly approached each magi and whispered in the ear of each one. And one by one, the magi left very sad. Joseph had whispered in their ear that they had forgotten the child.

Although Chesterton's tale doesn't put down our current achievements, it does suggest that by themselves they will not provide the way to God's Kingdom. The real problem is not what the magi brought, but what they did NOT bring. They have forgotten the child – Jesus Christ. They also neglected the need for humility, a dependence on God, and recognition that true peace is a gift from God.

St. Augustine says there are three ways to God: 1<sup>st</sup> is humility. 2<sup>nd</sup> is humility. 3<sup>rd</sup> is humility. Let us humbly approach the Christ our King, who joins us today in word and sacrament. Let us remember and image him in our living and loving...always.

## Baptism of the Lord, Jan. 9, 2022

It was the Easter vigil. John was to be baptized by immersion. The priest whispered to him, “Remember, John, every part of you that goes under water belongs to God.” John said, “Wait a second, Father.” And John, reached into his pocket, pulled out his money clip, held it up in the air and said, “I’m ready.”

When most of us were baptized we were infants. When Jesus is baptized, the opposite is true: he knew exactly what he was doing, and those with him were uncomfortable with this memory and played it down. Among the evangelists, John doesn’t even mention it, Mark openly depicts it, and Matthew qualifies the event by having John protest it by saying that Jesus should baptize him. **Luke, our guide for this liturgical year, alludes to Jesus’ baptism, then spotlights the descent of the Spirit and the divine voice that named Jesus as God’s beloved son.**

Luke tells us that John’s preaching left people filled with expectation. John preached radical conversion. Jesus focuses on the Kingdom of God. You can’t have one without the other. The teacher of the kingdom of God – Jesus – becomes a disciple of the preacher, John the Baptist. You can’t have one without the other. Both were radical in their call for conversion of self in relationship to all of God’s children, esp. the poor.

Jesus empties himself of all that he is. He becomes the slave (servant), the poor laborer, the leper, the forgotten man or woman he is standing next to in line. He plunges headlong into the dark dirty water of the human condition at the River Jordan. His baptism unites him in his relationship to the Baptizer, his cousin, and to John’s baptism as well. Jesus surrendered himself to all people, including us, calling us to build up the kingdom of God.

Our baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ is our call to surrender ourselves to God’s very presence among us as Father, Son, and Spirit. We are God’s beloved through our baptism. Our call is to pass forward God’s love to all that we touch in life, with all that we have and all that we are. Our call is to lift others up with our blessing...to let others know that they TOO are beloved...and to receive God’s blessing that come our way from God, who is good...ALL THE TIME.

After I baptize a child, I usually fill up a bottle of holy water and suggest to the parents that they bless the child every day with holy water along with their love. I was invited to celebrate Mass before a Charger-Ram preseason game by coach Bobby Ross years ago. We talked about faith. Bobby is Catholic. He said his Dad would come into his room and bless him and his brother EVERY night with Holy Water. Of course, he and his brother would try to block it, but rarely succeeded.

A priest friend of mine always asks for a blessing from those he anoints...if possible. I asked him why he does that, and he said, “Right now they are closer to God than I am.” Let us ‘let go’...let God...all the time...as we remember our baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday, Cycle C, 2022

**“My hour has not yet come.”** Don’t try to use that excuse with your mother. It didn’t even work for Jesus. Today we hear about wine at a wedding and God’s gift to a people who had lost touch with joy. On a deeper level, it is about the Jewish people, who by the time John writes his gospel have seen the temple destroyed. And it is about the hope and joy that Christ gives to all who read and proclaim the story as we gather today. It’s a story we need to hear in this pandemic time, where joy is at a premium in our world.

Pope Francis, in his exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, reminded us that we are called to proclaim with our lives, the good news. He said, “We can’t be going around with long, sour faces.” Instead we are to transform the water poured over us @ baptism into the wine of Christ’s joy, like that brightens any wedding feast.

There’s an old African folktale, in which a great chief planned a banquet and invited all the men in the village. The chief would furnish all the food and entertainment, but those invited would each bring a jug of wine which would be poured into a huge vat. One man told his wife he didn’t have a jug of wine. His wife told him to go and buy a jug. But, after thinking about it, he thought that with all the wine, no one would notice the jug of water he brought.

Drums beat out inviting all to the feast. The man went and poured his jug of water into the vat. When the chief saw that all were there, he ordered the servants to fill each man’s cup with wine from the vat, and ordered the first toast. Each one drank from his cup: Disbelief. They drank again, BUT what they tasted was water not wine. Each man had had the same idea. **THEY RECEIVED WHAT THEY GAVE.**

Jesus’ reply – my hour has not come – wasn’t enough for Mary. Representing her people, representing her needy world, she simply told the servants to do what Jesus bid them, knowing when that happened all would be well.

Two millennia later, Martin Luther King, Jr. picked up Mary’s theme in his book Why We Can’t Wait, he wrote “Time itself is neutral; it can be used destructively or constructively.” Like Mary telling the servants to obey Jesus, King said, “Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of people being willing to be co-workers with God.” King wrote about the change that was past due for people of African descent in the U.S. Like him, women and impoverished people in the Catholic Church are saying that necessary changes can’t wait for the “right time” because when it comes to reform, that time never arrives.

As we enter a new church year, Mary of Nazareth, the persistent guest at Cana, urges us to believe that the hour has come. The reign of God can be palpable in our time, in our midst. If we pour our own wine, our very selves, into seeking justice and basic human rights and dignity for every person, then we can overcome racism and all the “isms” that prevent us from reflecting the very image of God. The hour has come to look at Christ, listen to Christ and do what he tells us. Then we will know the joy God intends for ALL humanity.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, January 23, 2022-01-22

The eminent anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked what she regarded as the earliest sign of civilization. Was it an axe-blade, an arrowhead, a fishhook, or something more sophisticated, such as a musical instrument or a ceramic bowl?

Her answer surprised the questioner: She said, “A healed femur (bone).” It was not something MADE by a human, but something HUMANE; not an artifact, but part of someone who once lived and walked this earth, who was hurt BUT HEALED.

Dr. Mead explained that where the law of the “survival of the fittest” reigns, a broken leg means certain death – when you can’t make it ON YOUR OWN, you’re doomed. But a healed bone is physical evidence that someone CARED. Someone gathered food for that injured person until his or her leg was healed; someone cared for that person until he/she could for oneself.

**The first sign of civilization was compassion.**

Whoever first set that bone and cared for that injured person so the bone could heal was the first great prophet of compassion. Jesus begins his public (in Luke’s gospel), after his baptism by John and his time in the desert. He goes home and enters the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth. He begins his ministry by invoking the vision of the prophet Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the Lord’s favor.*

Isaiah’s vision of a world transformed and reconciled in God’s peace and justice is fulfilled IN Jesus. And **in our own baptism**, we take on the work of “fulfilling” Jesus’ vision of healing, justice, mercy and compassion in our own civilization and time. Jesus wakes up that synagogue crowd that day with the cold reality that they are to be God’s presence right here and now. That message reminds us TODAY of our mission: to proclaim God’s presence and good news with our lives.

I’ve experienced many times in this county fundraisers **when one of ours is hurting...often a child**. The energy to bring help and healing is tremendous. Compassion flows like a river. But what about our continued awareness and compassion for the immigrant, the poor and others WE DON’T feel are “our own?” We are to be continually be on the lookout for all who are hurting...from womb to tomb. It is our mission passed on to us through our baptism in the Christ. That mission is summed up in two words: mercy and compassion. We have everything we need: The Spirit of God is poured on us today through the Eucharist we receive. Pass it on!

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Ordinary Time C, 2022

This scene took place on a British Airway flight between Johannesburg, South Africa and London, England. A white woman, about 50 years old, was seated next to a black man. Disturbed by this, she called the air hostess over, “You obviously do not see it then?” she said. “You placed me next to a black man. I do not agree to sit next to someone from such a repugnant group. Give me an alternative seat.”

“Be calm please,” the hostess replied, “Almost all the places on the flight are taken. I will go to see if another place is available.” The hostess went away and then came back a few minutes later. “Madam, just as I thought, there are no other available seats in the Economy Class. I spoke to the captain, and there is no seat in the Business Class either. However, given the circumstances, the captain feels that it would be scandalous to make someone sit next to someone sooo disgusting.”

She turned to the black gentleman and said, “Sir, if you would like to, please collect your hand bag, a seat awaits you in First Class.” The other passengers, shocked by what had transpired, stood and applauded. Speaking the truth doesn’t always bring applause like the captain and stewardess received.

Jesus finds that out in the gospel proclaimed today. He was doing fine in his home-town synagogue until the truth literally hit home. He reminds the folks that their faith must respond in action. He then presents two examples of faith, Namaan the Syrian who suffered from leprosy, and the widow of Zaraphath. Both responded in faith to God’s prophets: Elijah and Elisha. God’s call to faith extends beyond the circle of religion, in this case Judaism...in our case Catholicism.

What we must be about is the truth. And there is a price to pay. Some folks might walk away from us; some folks might threaten us with harm. Namaan walked into the murky waters of the Jordan and came out clean as a whistle. The Widow of Zarapheth made a last meal (or so she thought) for her son and the prophet as well. It turned out to be a meal that only ended when the famine ended.

Jeremiah, classical prophet, understood his call was from God. He continually returned to his call from God, where he was wonderfully knit in his mother’s womb. We are challenged to return to our baptismal call to be priest, prophet and king. And there is a cost to discipleship. God wants our whole lives...not just part of us...and includes telling the truth and respecting each and every person, regardless of color or religion...always.

Paul focuses on what is really important: love. He places love at the top of our list in the context of all that God has given us. Because God has first loved us, everything we do is to be based on God’s love.

The challenge of the gospel is how we ride with and walk with the folks that make up our lives. Is our motivation to love them and seek the best for them? And what kind of person are we to ride with and walk with? There is room on God’s plane for all of us. And that folks is good news. Let’s live it.



5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C (2022)

Years ago, when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade, my brother, Walter, Jr., who was four years younger, were walking to school. He was nagging me about something as we walked. He was walking ahead of me about 20-25 feet or so, and finally I had had enough. I picked up a rock and said, "If you don't stop I'm going throw this at you, and hit you in the head." That increased his taunting me. And so I threw, and it was a great throw, bopping him on the head. I rushed to him, and there was blood gushing from his head. We weren't far from home, and just then Dad drove by, wrapped Jr.'s head, got him in the truck and said, "**You get to school. I'll deal with you later.**"

So, I got to school, and everyone asked where Jr. was. I told them he "wasn't feeling well." But after getting stitched up, Dad made him go to school. And he arrived with a bandage around his head. And the whole truth was told. But Dad's words – "**I'll deal with you later.**" - had me worried. I thought I had earned "the belt."

So Dad called me upstairs after supper. And he said, "I know he was nagging you. BUT you're older and should know better." We talked, and he gave me a hug at the end.

I share that story with our 2<sup>nd</sup> graders every year when they make their 1<sup>st</sup> reconciliation. I share that story today because it is the best illustration of God's word proclaimed today. In spite of our faults and failures, God does not stop loving us. We were lucky to have parents who imaged God's unconditional love for us.

Isaiah: "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips...yet my eyes have seen the king."

Paul: "I am the least of the apostles because I persecuted the church..I don't deserve it."

Peter: "Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

God always welcomes us back without condition or limit. We sometimes expect too little from our relationship with God. We sometimes expect too little from our relationship with God...we're neither good enough nor wise enough to consider ourselves "religious." Like Isaiah, Paul and Peter, we shy away from God because we can't imagine God loving sinful, Godless us. That is exactly the mystery of God: God loves us despite ourselves.

Thomas Merton observed that the "**root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved by God**, irrespective of one's worth. In the true Christian vision of God's love, the idea of worthiness loses significance. The revelation of the **mercy of God** makes the problem of worthiness almost laughable...no one could ever, alone, be strictly WORTHY to be loved by such a love. When we realize this, it is a true liberation of spirit."

It's as simple as the old Bible School song refrain:

Oh how I love Jesus...because he first loved me.

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, February 13, 2022-02-12

Once upon a time, a certain king was very rich and powerful. But he was unhappy, for he desired a wife. Without a queen, the vast palace was an empty shell. One day, while riding through the streets of a small hamlet, he saw a beautiful peasant girl.

He wondered how he might win her love. First he thought of issuing a royal decree commanding her to be his bride – BUT he quickly realized that, if she were forced to obey a royal decree, the king would never know if she genuinely loved him OR married him as an obedient and loyal subject.

Next the king considered overwhelming the maid with diamonds and silver and royal finery – BUT he knew he would always wonder if she genuinely loved him or married him only for the riches and power he could give her.

He then thought about disguising himself as a peasant in order to meet her – BUT he dismissed that ideal as too deceitful to be worthy of a king.

In the end, the king decided to shed his fine robes and royal prerogatives and go to the village and BECOME a peasant. He would live and work and laugh and suffer among them. THIS THE KING DID...and won the young woman's heart and she became his wife and king.

**Soren Kierkegaard used this parable to describe the mystery of God's love for us...in the birth, death and resurrection of Christ.** Paul reminds us today that through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection we have a call to life and to LOVE. This love begins with family and friends, and the challenge of Jesus is that this love be extended to ALL.

It is good that we have a Valentine's Day to remind us of our call to love. THE VALENTINE from God is God's own son, who became one of us to show us the way. **It is important that we try to make EVERY DAY Valentines Day in our love for those closest to us and to ALL, even our enemies.**

The parable reminds us that love cannot be forced, or bought or faked. It is only real when it is freely given. Those of you who are married and I did not understand all that was entailed of us as we made the vows and promises on the day of our marriages or ordination. And so we give thanks to all who have modeled love, unconditional love, for us over the years.

Luke's Gospel blessings and woes in Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, reinforce Jeremiah's curses and blessings that were issued centuries before. Love is not something we achieve. Love is something we give. **The blessed are those who work for a better future not only for themselves, but for others as well.** Our model in all of this is the Christ. As we share the Body of Christ at this Eucharist, we are to BE Christ's love always in ALL WAYS. And God is good...all the time.

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time, C – 2022

Be merciful as your God is merciful. Love your enemies. Love those who hate you. All of this is easier said than done. Maybe enemy is too strong a word – but given the state of our current public discourse, it's clear that there is a lot of anger in the air and airways. We are deeply divided, and there are perhaps folks we don't want anything to do with.

Episcopal minister, writer and spiritual directory Barbara Cawthorne offers a perspective on “praying” for our enemies. “Pray first for the one you disagree with that infuriates you...leave the details out...you don't need to say anything else. Leave the details out. God is fully informed of our affairs. We don't need to tell God things. God knows.”

“Just name them before God...Just lift them up to God for blessing, the same blessing for which you yourself long. You need to do nothing beyond this in prayer. Your foe will become a person to you.” (And we're all aware, acutely aware of our own faults.) Recognizing that Saul was anointed by God, David did him no harm.

**Perhaps you remember that Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago was falsely accused by Steven J. Cook of Sexual abuse. It made big Headlines. The Cardinal said at he time that he was publicly before the world. What did not make headlines was the reconciliation that happened after Steven Cook dropped the lawsuit. It did make our Diocesan newspaper, *The Messenger*.**

**The Cardinal met with Steven, gave Steven a Bible and celebrated Mass with him in a chapel. During the Mass he anointed Steven, who was dying from AIDS. Bernadin said that Steven told him a “big burden had been lifted, he felt healed and was at peace. He also asked the Cardinal to tell the story of his reconciliation with the church and with me.” I repeat that story and end it with these words: Be merciful even as your God is merciful.**

**Living the words of Jesus is not easy. It is tough...especially this part about loving our enemies. And yet we are called to be the living word as we proclaim it today.**

**Three people were discussing recent translations of the Bible. One liked the New American version – used in liturgy. The SECOND said he liked the Jerusalem translation because it is more poetic. The THIRD said, “I like my grandmother's translation best of all. She translated the Bible into her actions in daily life.”**

**You write a new page of the Gospel each day  
By the things you do and the words you say.  
People read what you write whether faithful or true.  
What is the gospel according to you?**

**Remember as you write your gospel, and as you struggle to forgive your enemies: God forgives you and GOD IS WITH YOU. I could do a better job of proclaiming the gospel, how about you?**

## 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Ordinary Time, Year C

Ben Sirach tells us: “One’s faults begin when one speaks.” This goes well with Jesus’ questions in today’s gospel: “Can a blind man guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? I came into the world so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind.” **(Story of two blind people crossing the street.)** Jesus’ uses sight for his first metaphor. Sometimes we don’t really see others because of the plank in our eye, which might be as simple as the fact that we’ve never really met them. To see others clearly begins as the song goes with “taking a look at ourselves so we can differently and putting our hands in the hands of the man from Galilee”, Jesus. However, blind people really know what it is to be blind.

The second image Jesus uses of trees and fruit complements the first. Good teachers, like good trees, are recognizable by how their teaching affects others. According to Gallup polls, the number of people claiming Church affiliation has dropped over 20% the last 20 years...from 70% in 1999 to 47% in 2020. At the same time, the self-help market is expected to grow twice as fast as inflation in the upcoming decade. **The point is that our independence-loving culture is becoming ever more individualistic and isolated – a situation that William de Britaine warned against in 1682 when he said: “He who will be his own counselor shall be sure to have a fool for a client.”**

The point is in both these images is that we need to take the first step to recovery: seeing more clearly with the help and contact with others who notice our planks for what they are: obstructions to a sense of community.

Pope Francis describes the peril that we face today. He laments that “**the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading**, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an **outdated utopia**. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable and globalized indifference...concealed behind a **deceptive illusion**: thinking that we are all-powerful, **while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat.**”

Perhaps we really do need to listen more than talk. Jesus calls us to remove the beam that blocks our vision; Frances calls us to come together in dialogue to create a different world. The very act of listening is an admission that we need to see through others eyes as well as our own. We are all blind in some way; admitting it will lead us to wonder and make us care with and for one another: in the long run that will be enough.

Russia invaded Ukraine this week. The collateral effect is already frightening: loss of innocent life and the creation of perhaps millions of new refugees. Our listening and helping can ease the burden: like two blind people helping each other cross the street.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, C -2022

The first Sunday of Lent is always a story about Jesus' temptation by the devil in the desert. And I always tell the story about a man who always brought a box of donuts to work every Thursday. He proclaimed on Ash Wednesday that he was giving donuts up for Lent. BUT the next day, he came in with a box of donuts. His co-workers laughed and said, "What happened to your resolution?" He said, "I was praying on the way to work, and asked God to open up a parking spot right in front of the bakery if it was all right to have donuts, and sure enough, the 9<sup>th</sup> time around the block, there it was – wide open."

It is amazing that Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell the story of Jesus' temptation. Scripture scholars suggest this is a story the evangelists would not have invented. It must have come from something Jesus shared about his own experience. A key to Luke's telling is that the devil in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> temptations with the challenge, "**If you are the son of God...**" It reminds us that Jesus' trip to the desert follows his baptism by John in the Jordan River. Luke also has a genealogy (on Joseph's side) traces Jesus all the way back to Adam – whom Luke also calls the **son of God**. And so Luke presents the temptations of Jesus' struggle to live as a **faithful son of God**. It is the same struggle we have as we do our best to follow Jesus. And it wasn't one time only...for in Luke 22:28, Jesus tells his disciples, "You have stood by me in my time of temptations."

It was not a matter of hunger, for Jesus, but the **purpose** of his life. And so he was always about doing God's will. He sent his disciples out with nothing extra...dependant on the faith of those to whom they proclaimed the gospel, relying on God alone. The devil offered the methodology of the powerful: fear and coercion and a rule book that says **it doesn't matter if might makes right because might can trump anything else**. What is happening with the invasion by Russia of the Ukraine? It appears to be one man's war...while the Russian public is kept in the dark with real "fake news." And the devil is an expert at disguise, slicker than fake news and much subtler than our ads that claim absurdities like the idea that love is contained in a certain make of car.

We believe that a man named Jesus of Nazareth was a human being in every sense of the word. We, his sons and daughters in faith, endure temptation to be something else. If Adam and Eve only realized that they were already children of God...and so it goes.

With all this in mind, today's Gospel invites us into our 40 days of Lent as a time to learn from Jesus' decisions about how to be a faithful Son or Daughter of God. He did it to show us how to do the same. And God is good...all the time. Let's strive to be the same. As Paul said to the Romans: "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent, 2022

“What would you like to be?” asked the teacher to her 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class. And so the answers came from the children: a firefighter, a baseball player, a doctor, a farmer, a dentist, and police man or woman, a teacher. Then the teacher called on Johnny who had his hand raised excitedly. And Johnny said, “I’d like to be **possible**.” “And why do you say that?” asked the teacher. Johnny replies, “Because Mom often tells me I’m **impossible**.”

Our God is about making the impossible **possible**. God calls Abraham by having him look at the stars of the sky, which are as numerous as his descendants will be. Abraham, who had left his home at God’s bidding, and whose wife Sarai, like Abram, was very old, questions **how this can all be possible**. Overhearing the conversation, Sarah laughs. God has the last laugh, and a year later, she bears their son, named Isaac, which means “laughter.” God had the last laugh. **How is it possible?** They walked with God. God seals the covenant by also passing through the split animals in the darkness as a flaming torch.

Paul reminds the Philippians and us this second Sunday that citizenship in God’s heaven is **possible** for all of us. We achieve that by imitating the Christ, by being suffering servants as was the Christ. We are to stand firm with God.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James and John are invited to see the possibility that is open for them in the person of Jesus. As HE is transfigured before their eyes, they will be transformed if they listen to him and follow him. Jesus transcends even Moses and Elijah (law and prophets). All becomes **possible** for us who trust in the Christ and are nourished with his presence in word and sacrament today.

This was witnessed on a New York street corner: A homeless man is sitting on the curb near St. Bartholomew’s Church. He has set his hat in front of him begging. A shabbily dressed homeless woman, dragging a cart filled with her possessions in shopping bags, walks by.

She pauses in front of the man. Deciding he was worse off than she was, she takes out of her worn, ripped coat pocket two crumpled bills and places them in his hat.

It is a random set of charity that goes almost unnoticed by the world, a snapshot of compassion that both inspires the spirit and breaks the heart. It is a reminder that all things are **possible** for those who trust in Christ’s humanity/dignity that reside in us.

In light of the recent tragic war that Russia is waging against the citizens of Ukraine, when darkness consumes us one again, we are to ponder and act to make the impossible **possible**. Many are doing that in the neighboring countries as they look after the million(s) of refugees seeking. Only love can light up and end the darkness of hatred and violence.

God is good...all the time. Let us be the light of Christ for all we encounter. Let us be the light of all that is possible in our world through the presence of Christ we share today.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, Cycle C, 2022

In his African village, Zacharias served for many years as a catechist and elder of the parish. After a long life of service to his church and the people of Kenya, Zacharias died and was laid to rest.

After the funeral, another catechist said of Zacharias, “We will miss him. He went *Ki-sabuni* – Swahili for ‘like a bar of soap’”. “Like a what?” she was asked.

“*Ki-sabuni*,” she repeated. “You know. In the house, the bar of soap sits next to the basin, available morning, noon and night to all – children, adults, the elderly, family and guests alike. It never discriminates or complains of being used and re-used. It is taken for granted as it slowly disappears, until someone exclaims, ‘Gosh, the soap is gone!’” Zacharias was that kind of man.” (Story by Fr. Gerry Nolf in Once Upon a Time in Africa.)

In today’s Gospel, Jesus exalts the humble and generous ‘soaplike- service of faithful ministers like Old Zacharias who take on the selfless work of the gardener in today’s Gospel. In their unconditional service to others, they mirror the unconditional love of God; in their generosity of heart and spirit, they are sources of grace and hope that enable us to restore the “fig trees” of our lives.

Christ calls us to embrace the hope of the fig tree and the determination of the gardener, to remember that God’s endless grace enables us to experience the promise of hope and resurrection in every sin and ‘death’ we experience. May the ‘gardeners’ and ‘bars of soap’ like Old Zacharias who bless our lives with God’s mercy and forgiveness inspire us to be similar sources of peace, reconciliation grace to all the struggling and broken among us.

God is good...all the time. Let us strive for the same, forgiving ourselves and passing that hope and mercy to all whom we are privileged to serve.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, Cycle C – 2022

The late Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, Michigan, delighted in speaking to groups about the Prodigal Son story. He would note the four scenes in the gospel: 1. The younger son asks for his inheritance and leaves; 2. His life of debauchery ending with him coming upon hard times and returning home; 3. His re-union with his Father; 4. his father and older son arguing in the yard while the party goes on inside. And then he would ask his audience to write their own endings. Bishop Untener's 5<sup>th</sup> scene goes like this:

While the father and son were out in the backyard arguing, **the mother** came out. And she said to them, "Now I have had just about enough. You're both acting like children, and I'm tired of it." Then she said to her HUSBAND: "You've always favored our youngest and you know it. Our older son works hard day in and day out, and you take him for granted. As a matter of fact, you take me for granted too. It is about time you start noticing you own family for a change.

Following this, the mother said to her OLDER SON: "And you, you always like to be the martyr. You act as if you're the only one who has ever had to go the extra mile or had to do things that go unnoticed. Well, let me tell you something, I've had to do it too, and so does everybody else. So it is about time that you learned that sometimes you just have to swallow hard, and do what has to be done, realizing that sometimes life isn't fair.

Then the mother went inside to the party and came out with her YOUNGER SON by the ear. "And you, you're acting like a spoiled little prince. You're in there celebrating with your friends, and you never thought to ask about how your older brother was, or go over to him and thank him for doing all the work while you were gone. You think the whole world revolves around you. It is about time you realize that it doesn't."

And finally, she said to all three of them: "I've had enough of this bickering. The three of you shake hands and work out your differences some other time. We've got company in there so you get in there and start treating them the way we always treat our guests. And you'd better start treating each other the way a family should treat each other. If you can't do that, there are lots of places you can go and get a job feeding the pigs."

How refreshing to have a Catholic bishop calling for a feminine perspective to help cast light on this wonderful parable. The night I was there, Bishop Untener concluded with: "Of course, that doesn't resolve everything, but then the parables never do, because life is complicated. But we give thanks that we have a God who understands...a God who sends his Son to give us parables like this, parables that reveal the truth about us and about our God. – Dick Westley, Professor Emeritus, Loyola University, Chicago, IL



## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – C - 2022-04-02 – Sr. Mary McGlone

Today, in a story unusual for the Gospel of John, we meet an unnamed woman famous because Jesus saved her from a crowd who were out to get him. Picture today's passion-filled gospel scene. It opens when a group of meticulously righteous prigs interrupt Jesus as he is teaching near the temple. They incorporate Jesus in the periphery of the circle they form around a helpless, probably angry and disheveled woman. It's all a setup for them to demand that he pronounce his opinion about how to respond to adultery.

They think they have designed the perfect no-won situation: Jesus has to choose between contradicting God's law and being an accomplice to stoning their prey, a woman about whom they care no more than fishermen care about the worms they secure for their hooks

The opening line of today's **first reading from Isaiah** describes God as the one who "opens a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters." It goes on to quote God as saying, "Remember not the events of the past...see, I am doing something new."

When that crowd of bullies set their stage, they weren't counting on Jesus to represent the God Israel had described. The gang who shamed the woman...amassed a crowd of onlookers and created a tumult comparable to a stormy sea as they misquoted chapter and verse about the punishment she deserved: See Deuteronomy 22 and Leviticus 30. Man?

Jesus responds with gesture and silence. What was the silent writing? Could it have been Ezekiel 16:36-40...where God accuses unfaithful Israel of adultery? Or was it simply the name Hosea, whose life mirrored God's as betrayed spouse of (Israel). Whatever Jesus wrote it indicted every person in the crowd, dousing their pretentiousness in a cold bath of self-recognition. **NO ONE HAD ANOTHER WORD TO SAY** when Jesus invited the sinless to cast the first stone. As St. Augustine said: "the two of them remained: mercy with misery."

The twist in the story is that the bullies unwittingly cemented a unique communion between Jesus and the woman (*whom Sr. Mary names Kalena: Gk. name with roots in words for both beloved and tortured.*) **Bringing them together as objects of their manipulation, they gave Jesus free rein to do what he did best:** Invite another into new life. Those who scorned him for consorting with sinners threw him together with someone who needed his kind of freeing love.

The scene we contemplate today has delicious irony. In effect, the crowd who brings the woman to Jesus has acted like the people who carried their sick to be healed; in an attempt to damn her, they introduced her into the realm of grace. Instead of trapping Jesus, they were **forced themselves to judge themselves by the implications of their cherished law.**

In the end, this woman is the one who could say with Paul: **"I have indeed been taken possession of by Jesus Christ."** Today, we are invited to contemplate Jesus, with our three "Elect" women who stand before us in their final scrutiny. Let's with them "take a good look at ourselves so that we can look at each other differently" with God's eyes. Formed by God, let's stop dwelling on the PAST in order to see what grace and mercy makes possible. Or as Grandma said so often: **Lord have mercy.**

## Palm Sunday

After the story of the Palm Sunday Gospel:

The “demonstration” that takes place in this Palm Sunday Gospel causes as much alarm to the Pharisees as the protests of the Russian people threatened their leader in the wake of the invasion of their Ukrainian neighbors. Almost 2,000 people in 53 Russian cities were detained that first day of the invasion, more than 1,000 of them in Moscow and 340 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city, St. Peterersburg. The protests have continued...and some are still jailed and fined. Putin’s government calls them “traitors.”

The people who line Jesus’ path and lay their cloaks and palm branches on the road are expressing their hope in God’s peace and justice and mercy. – their action challenges the Roman concept of peace: peace that is control manipulated by fear and intimidation.

The liturgy of this Passion/Palm Sunday challenges us to decide what “demonstration” we are a part of: Do we “stand” with Jesus and those who seek real peace or those in power?

After the Passion and Death Gospel:

Each Gospel is really a collection of stories about Jesus that the author received from a number of different sources in the early Christian communities. It is clear that the story about Jesus that was told earliest and most frequently was the story about the last 18 hours of his life – the way that he died.

Luke (whose Passion account is read today also) presents a portrait of Jesus as someone, if you only knew him, you would love. Luke paints this picture of Jesus in scene after scene as someone who was warm and loving. If people ever allowed themselves to be open to him, they would become his disciples. That, for Luke, is the heart of being a disciple – this warm, loving relationship with Jesus. Let’s follow him this week AND ALWAYS in our care for ALL humanity.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – 2022

After I was ordained I taught, coached and served as Pastoral Services at Assumption High School in East St. Louis, and served the parishes of Holy Family, Cahokia, St. Regis, East St Louis and Sacred Heart, Dupo, for nine years. When I began at Assumption the student body was about 50/50 white and black and about 60% Catholic. It was the most cultural diversity I have encountered in ministry. Sometimes I found myself at other non-Catholic churches in East St. Louis to support our students there. One song that still sticks in my memory at one of those churches was: *Throw out the Lifeline!* It was great...we were fired up...throw out the lifeline of Christ.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter is a mixed bag for celebration. On one hand we celebrate the resurrection with joy, but on the other hand we are reminded of the cross in all the scripture proclaimed. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and gang is brought before the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the Christ. The Sanhedrin was a group of Jewish leaders who decided cases of Jewish law. The good news got the apostles in bad trouble...But they leave rejoicing that they were found worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. The account from Revelation offers a heavenly vision around the throne of God, BUT the lamb that was slain was front and center.

John's gospel has my favorite Easter fishing story. Jesus meets Peter and the gang fishing again. Instead of fishing for people, they have returned to life as normal, BUT Jesus appears on the seashore waiting for them. After telling them to cast out to the "right side" they have a big catch of fish – 153. John gives a wink here here...they caught them all. They recognize Jesus in this BIG CATCH.

Then we have the poignant dialogue between Peter and Jesus. Reminiscent of Peter's previous promise of faith of Jesus, followed by his triple denial of him, **three** times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him. Three times Peter says he does. Each time Jesus commands him to "feed or tend" my sheep. BUT then Jesus alludes to the type of death that awaits Peter (upside down crucifixion declaring he wasn't worthy to be Crucified in the manner of his Lord). This time Peter got the lesson.

As followers of the Christ we are to remember that to follow the Christ we are to tend the flock as well. We are to throw out THE LIFELINE – the Christ – to all whom we encounter. We are promised nothing but life...even in death. We believe when we feed others as Jesus did. We believe when we throw out the net to catch people as the apostles eventually learned and did. The fishing for people never ends.

Each day is a new day TO THROW OUT THE LIFE LINE!

4<sup>th</sup> Easter, 2022, C

Happy Mother's Day and Good Shepherd Sunday!

Every evening she could hear the newborn in the apartment next door cry and cry. The young parents put the child in a room alone in the dark. The baby cries a long time; the exhausted parents clearly oblivious to their child's anguish or are at a loss of what to do.

What can and should she do? She's not sure. Speaking to the parents might make what is just an annoying situation into something worse, **SO SHE DECIDES TO SING.**

Just as she can hear the baby, so the baby can hear her. So every evening when her mom and dad put the child to sleep, she sings lullabies and cradlesongs, talks softly and reassuringly to the baby through the walls, and she consoles and comforts the child. The baby hears her invisible friendly voice and falls asleep peacefully, without a tear or whimper. (Piero Ferrucci, The Power of Kindness.

Christ speaks in many voices – including our own. We can be the “voice” of Christ's compassion, comfort, forgiveness, mercy and peace in even our smallest and simplest “songs” of kindness and selflessness. To hear the voice of the Good Shepherd demands that we let ourselves emerge from the isolation of our own fears and disappointments, our resentments and expectations. **WE TOO CAN HEAR THE VOICE OF THE CHRIST SPEAKING IN THE PLIGHT OF THE POOR, THE NEEDS OF THE HELPLESS, THE CRY OF THE PERSECUTED.**

In turn, the Risen One asks us to be his voice to them in the compassion, support and forgiveness we work for and offer in His spirit of Easter peace.

What do we do about the senseless violence with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the intentional bombing of apartment buildings, schools, and churches? What do we do with the senseless murders in our own cities and schools? In the midst of death and destruction, we are called to hear the shepherd's voice, a mother's voice, who cries out for healing, compassion, help and hope. As Mr. Roger's mom told him when would watch a tragedy play out on TV, **“look for the good people trying to help.”**

The good news is that have a shepherd who hears us, who is always listening to the cry of the poor, the suffering the fearful. Let us be the voice of the shepherd (mother) as we look out for and after each other. Let us sing his song of compassion, help, hope and peace.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – 2022

In the book of Revelation, John shares a vision “of a **new** heaven and a **new** earth.” Paul and Barnabas, rejected in synagogues, embark on a **new** mission to take the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. In John’s gospel, “Jesus gives his disciples a **new** commandment: Love another as I have loved you.”

And how does Love? In John’s gospel there is no narrative of the last supper or first Eucharist that we heard in the synoptic gospels. Jesus instead shows his disciples **HOW** they are to love. They are to **wash the feet of others**. Throughout John’s gospel, Jesus eats with sinners, cures people on the Sabbath, reaches out to Nicodemus in the darkness, encounters the woman at the well, cures the man born blind, and raises Lazarus from the dead. He stops to listen, meet people where they are at like the woman at the well or the man born blind. He tells stories of God’s kingdom, and often goes off to pray by himself, reflecting on the kingdom God wants for everyone.

Katharine Hanschu remembers her beloved grandfather. “Grandpa was a man of integrity. He was a rancher who loved his family fiercely and passed down simple yet important life lessons. My dad tells a story about helping his dad wash borrowed farm equipment before they returned it to a neighbor. ‘Why are we cleaning this?’, he asked his dad, ‘It was dirty when we got it.’ Grandpa replied: ‘Always return something a little better than when you borrowed it.’

“ A week after Grandpa’s funeral, I helped my dad vacuum, wash, and refuel a car he had borrowed from a friend. After accepting the vehicle the friend leaned over to me and remarked, ‘Whenever I loan something to your dad, I know it will come back in even better shape.’ And that was my grandpa’s legacy. He left the world a little better than he found it. I hope I can do the same.”

Jesus left folks a lot better than when he encountered them, except for those who refused to listen. How do we follow the Christ? We pray and take action. Like the early church, followers of Jesus’ way of living, we strive to love others as Jesus loves us. We wait in hope for the place of peace foretold in the Book of Revelation by being instruments of God’s love and forgiveness and peace.

The war in Ukraine and other violence that surrounds us remind us that we have a way to go. We admire those who respond with help and compassion so that many lives can be saved. They have made things a bit better for the refugees and victims as they wait for more help. Let us resolve to make everyone we meet feel a bit better about themselves. Let us love one another.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Cycle C

In her weekly **New York Times** newsletter (March 13, 2022), Tish Harrison Warren published a prayer written by a Ukrainian woman after evacuating her home. The woman asked that her name be withheld because her husband's family was still in occupied territory, and they have been unable to contact them.

The woman begins her prayer:

“Father God, may the attackers’ fingers freeze; may they drop things; may they not see clearly; may their equipment malfunction; may they experience overwhelming hopelessness, enormous fatigue and a complete loss of any desire to fight; may their communication be broken; may there be confusion. Lead them to surrender.”

But then she asks this of God:

“The worst is yet to come, Lord, if you do not stop it. But please, no peace where there is no peace. We ask for peace untied with righteousness and truth.”

Pleading for God's protection for families suffering from hunger, illness and exhaustion, she closes her prayer:

“We repent of making idols of political leaders and news outlets. Forgive us for wanting them to be our gods and saviors. Forgive us for being unreasonable, for not wanting to admit both the good and bad in all of our leaders. It is this spirit that leads us to dictators because we abandon responsibility and reason. We confess the seeds of war that live in our own hearts.”

“We humble our hearts, our bodies. We ask for your mercy. Thank you that you love mercy and have all power.”

“Peace united with righteousness and truth.” This Ukrainian woman and the people of her country understand the concept of “peace” that Jesus “leaves” us. Christ's peace is a perspective that shapes all our actions, behavior and values; it is peace that is centered in our selfless love for others.

Many of us will settle for the absence of conflict and tension and call it “peace” – but the “peace” of the Risen Christ demands the hard work and sacrifice of putting aside our self-centered agendas in order to realize the Gospel vision of forgiveness and reconciliation, justice and community in our time and place.

Easter peace is the awareness of God's presence in EVERY moment of our lives, the confidence that our hope in the things of God will be realized, the assurance that the love of God is ours.

Peace be with you. Spread this good news from a God who is good, all the time.

## Feast of the Ascension – 2022

(Adapted from Ed Hays' story of the Ascension: St. George and the Dragon and the Quest for the Holy Grail: I have abbreviated the story)

Jesus the Master was ready to return to his Father. He stood on the mountaintop and the Father said, "Ascend, Son, Ascend." So Jesus raised his hands and began to ascend. St. John, the beloved suddenly burst from the crowd and grabbed Jesus' foot. Jesus told him to let go, but John shouted, "Don't go!" Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, "What now, Father." A voice from the clouds said, "Ascend, Son, Ascend!"

So Jesus again raised his hands and started to rise up again, but Mary, his Mother, broke from the crowd and grabbed his other foot. "Mother," Jesus said, "You should know better than anyone that I have to return to the Father!" So Jesus again looked to his Father and said, "What now? Father?" Father: "Ascend, Son, Ascend!" Jesus again raised his hands and started to rise up when the whole crowd ran forward to grab Jesus, John, Mary and each other until Jesus was holding up a large pyramid of people...as well as all the animals.

The Ascension looked like a circus act now! From the clouds came a voice, "Ascend, Son, Ascend!" And Jesus, so the story goes realized his true mission in life and death and resurrection and ascension. It was this. His purpose was to be a giant SKY HOOK!

And that is our purpose also: to catch others up, to hook others up, to lift others up into the mystery of God's love for us. We are **witnesses of God's love**. That is our purpose, our calling through the Baptism that we share. We witness to Christ's love by passing on that love to all we encounter, especially those most in need.

This Memorial Day weekend we honor those who first loved us: grandparents, parents, family and friends who have nurtured us with love. Fr. Ron Rolheiser suggests that the way we honor them best, pay tribute to them, hold their memory dear, is to pass on their goodness to us in our love for others in this circus of life.

Our world needs that love and care more now than ever. The atrocities of the war in the Ukraine, the hatred and division in our own nation, the slaying of the 21 innocents in Texas reminds us that **our witness of Christ's love** is needed more than ever.

Let us ascend with the Christ in our care for the poor in our midst.

Pentecost Sunday, 2022-06-04

The Laundromat Church

In **Just Tell the truth: a Call to Faith, Hope and Courage**, Richard Lischer tells the story of a priest who was assigned to start a ministry to the Latino community in a region where many were working on farms and in chicken-processing plants.

How to begin? A feasibility study? An advertising blitz? Here's what the priest does:

He takes a card table, a hand-woven blanket and some bread and a cruet of wine to the local laundromat, and there he sets up shop. Within weeks, Pentecost happens and a congregation materializes. Soon the patrons are crossing themselves and waiting for a break in the Mass to move their laundry from the washers to the dryers.

The "Laundromat Priest," as he became known, intones the words of the liturgy during the spin cycle. A newspaper reported that the congregation "stands respectfully toward the rear of the washerette, as if occupying holy ground."

It may seem, to us anyway, that this ministry doesn't have much promise. On the other hand, **all** it has is promise, and that is more than enough.

This church of ours begins in a room of confused and broken people. In the coming of the promised Spirit, they realized that Jesus lives among them in their love and care for one another.

At Pentecost, the Spirit of God opens Peter and company to all kinds of possibilities for realizing the Kingdom of God that Jesus died for – and rose for. It's the Spirit of God – invisible, difficult to define in mere words, but very real – that makes you and me and the folks gathered in that Laundromat the Church of the risen one.

The Spirit is that great love that binds the Father to the Son and now binds the Father and the Son to us, the bond that makes us not just a clan or a club, but a **community of faith. It's love that transcends words and laws and sentiments to embrace the heart and soul of each one of us.**

The Spirit of God is both a promise fulfilled and a promise yet to be realized. This Pentecost, may our community of the Risen Christ work to realize that promise of being to light God's vision of a world reconciled in God's peace and transformed in God's compassion. God is good all the time. Let us strive to do the same in our "spin time."



## Holy Trinity

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

There is an old Hasidic tale about the Israelites' escape from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. According to the story, Moses and the Israelites played their harps and flutes, sang and danced as the Red Sea parted to let the children of Israel pass through to safety.

But, in heaven, an angel says, "Wait. Look, the Creator of the Universe is sitting there weeping!" The heavenly host approached God and asked, "Why are you weeping when Israel, your nation and chosen people, has been delivered by your power?"

And God, the Master of the Universe said, "I am weeping for the dead Egyptians washed up on the shore – somebody's sons, somebody's husbands, somebody's fathers. They are my people too."

The compassion of God transcends our labels and stereotypes of race, nationality, gender and creed. "The spirit of truth," as Jesus promises, does not set up barriers between the "good" and the "bad" NOR define the differences between "us" and "them." We do.

God's Spirit seeks to make us understand that all men and women are children of God, sons and daughters of the Father, who loves and protects each and every one of us.

Today's feast of the Holy Trinity calls us to embrace the **vision** of God the Father, revealed by the Son and realized in the spirit: **NAMELY, THAT THE LOVE AND JUSTICE OF GOD BREAKS DOWN EVERY BARRIER WE ERECT AND TRANSCENDS EVERY CONDITION AND QUALIFICATION WE SET.**

The Spirit of God enables us to see one another as God sees us, to realize the love of God in our midst, to behold the love of God in every one of God's sons and daughters.

And that is the Gospel Truth. +

## Corpus Christi (Father's Day) June 19, 2022

Here is the story of mother/father putting young daughter/son to bed on a stormy, stormy night. Dad reassured her to remember that God was with her always and would protect her from harm. As he went to turn out the light, she blurted out: "But I need a God with skin." In short, that is why Jesus left the gift of himself to us in the Eucharist. God is with us and IN us so that we can put God's skin on for each other.

Paul condemns the Corinthians for **misusing** the celebration of the Eucharist in the passage that proceeds the 1<sup>st</sup> reading today. The celebration fosters more division than unity. **The centerpiece of Paul's argument comes in today's passage proclaimed.**

When Paul describes the Eucharistic meal, he emphasizes key elements: It happened on the night Jesus was betrayed: Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and identified himself with the broken bread. He then did the same with the wine.

With both the bread and the wine, he commanded his disciples to do what he did in remembrance of him. Only Luke and Paul cite Jesus' command to do this in Jesus' memory, and Paul says it twice.

To remember Jesus in the breaking of the bread involves a promise St. Augustine described as an act of receiving **WHAT WE ARE** so that **WE CAN BE WHAT WE RECEIVE: THE BODY OF CHRIST.**

In Pope Francis' words, "Taking part in the Eucharist means entering into the logic of Jesus, the logic of **GIVING FREELY.**"

This why Paul's teaching that the community itself is the body of Christ immediately follows his commentary about the Eucharist.

Today's Gospel, the only story retold six times in the Gospels, makes the same point. No version says that the **QUANTITY** of bread increased. Each rendition does say that the disciples claimed they did not have enough to respond to people's needs, that Jesus asked them to give everything they have, and when they did so, there was more than enough.

Paul tells the Corinthians that remembrance was the key. The lesson remains valid for us today. Jesus used bread and wine to symbolize how he consecrated his entire life for us. He invites us into communion with him in that consecration. Nothing else matters. Let us put Christ's skin, God's skin, the Spirit's skin on as we serve each other.

## Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

True story. An African king had conquered the territory of the Kasena, a powerful and shrewd tribe. Each year the king extracted tribute from the Kasena and would send a messenger. One year the king made the mistake of sending his son, his heir apparent to collect the tribute. When the Kasena saw the prince and his small entourage, they overpowered them and took the prince hostage.

The stripped the prince of his fine robes. He was given one meal a day and sent to work in the fields each morning. The sight of the royal heir digging in the field made him the object of derision among the Keshena. BUT the prince made no protest. He didn't try to escape. In fact, as he worked he sang. He sang loudly and happily as his back bent to the hoe from sunup to sundown.

The elders of the Keshena were troubled by his singing and disconcerted by his attitude. They finally summoned the prince. He stood before the council of elders. The chief asked the prince, "Why do you sing?"

He answered, "You have taken away everything from me and brought me to shame. But I can sing, I can sing because you cannot take away who I am. I sing because I am the son of a king. Despite your treatment of me, my dignity remains. And I sing...with gratitude...with hope...with joy."

In today's Gospel Jesus sends forth the 72 to proclaim the kingdom of God. Their mission is not about power but PEACE. It is not grounded in dominance but in humble service. They are sent forth not to condemn or chide, but to heal and lift up. They are to mirror in the attitude and work the humble, generous love of the God they proclaim, the Christ, their and our King.

They are to walk among and with those they were sent to serve – the difference is the "song" of compassion and reconciliation and hope they carry. It is the song of their king. In our love and service of others, God resides in us; in the kindness and care we are able to extend to others, the very presence of God is realized. Jesus entrusts that "song" to all of us as we are sent forth to proclaim the kingdom of God.

As we are fed with Christ's presence in word and sacrament, let us feed others with the goodness in us of the Kingdom of God.

## Sixteen Sunday, Ordinary Time

I know the movies I suggest are a bit dated. One is *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* I think the movie came out in the 1960's. Spencer Tracey and Audrey Hepburn are playing a couple whose daughter is coming home with a man they've never met, a doctor, to whom she is engaged. Her fiancé happens to be played by Sidney Poitier. Their daughter is white, Sidney's character of course is black. And they've invited his parents to meet her parents that night. Their daughter never tells her parents that he is African American. Her fiancé never told his parents she was white. And the fun begins.

Abraham has three strangers approach and he welcomes them to dine, as Sarah provides the hospitality. With the story of Abraham as a background and the good Samaritan story as its immediate Gospel predecessor, we hear of Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary.

As Luke tells the story, Martha appears to be the head of the household, the one who welcomed Jesus into their home. Then, as Martha goes about working, Mary sits in the position of a disciple at Jesus' feet.

Both Martha and Mary were stepping outside a traditional role. In a home where there is no mention of a man, Martha acts as hostess, and Mary takes the Abrahamic role of accompanying and listening to Jesus. Remember the early church noted two roles were necessary: service (diaconal) and listening to (and preaching) God's word.

As we listen to the story we should realize that although our translation says that Mary chose the "better," Luke quoted Jesus as saying, "Mary has chosen the good part." Hospitality demands both the service of preparing the meal and listening to the guests.

Guess who came to dinner with Abraham? Was it God or God's angels? It is interesting that there are three men: could it be Father, Son and Holy Spirit? God was certainly behind the son Sarah would bear within a year later: Isaac. (Laughter.) There is no need to guess who came to dinner with Mary and Martha. It was God's Son, God's word made flesh, Jesus, whom we call the Christ.

While there is bickering about who can receive the Eucharist today, for Jesus ALL were welcome. It seems that almost any time that Jesus was a guest or shared a meal; conflict came to the table because Jesus consistently stretched the limit as to who was welcome.

Who joins us today? The Christ. He calls us to eat his body and drink his blood so that we can proclaim his word with our lives. All of humanity is one, and demands our service. And we give thanks that God has joined us again in word and sacrament. Let us pass it on.