

AUGUST 5/6, 2017

Transfiguration of the Lord

1. In today's Gospel, Peter yearns to *do* something to make concrete the Transfiguration he has witnessed. But to be a good steward of his spiritual gift, he was instructed to *be still*, to *listen* to Jesus, and to *wait* for His direction. Good advice for us, too!

AUGUST 12/13, 2017

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. Elijah recognized the voice of God not in the strong and heavy wind, not in the earthquake, and not in the fire, but in a tiny whispering sound. May we find enough quiet in our clamorous world to hear His voice and discern what He is calling us to do and be.
2. Maintaining good stewardship over our faith life can, at times, be difficult. When Peter became distracted and took his eyes off Jesus, his faith faltered. How many times do we get distracted and let our stewardship of faith slip?

OR Today's Gospel reveals what miraculous things can happen when one embraces a single-minded faith in Jesus Christ. Peter gets out of a wind-tossed boat when the Lord calls him. His faith is tested by his obedience to Jesus who is calling him out onto the water. In the midst of the waves and the wind, Peter gets out of the boat and walks towards Jesus. Good stewards heed Christ's call to them. Sometimes that call directs them to take on seemingly impossible challenges. This week, reflect on how the Lord could be calling you out of the safety of your own "boat" to take on the impossible.

3. **"Oh you of little faith, why do you doubt?"** In today's Gospel, after stepping out of the boat to go to Jesus Peter starts to sink. He pleads to Jesus who lifts him up after chastising him for his lack of faith. It is tempting to be critical of Peter for losing faith in Jesus. But Peter did get out of the boat and step onto the water in violation of all he had experienced during a lifetime of working on the water as a fisherman. That took a great act of faith. But a single act of faith in Jesus is not sufficient for a true disciple. We must constantly renew and demonstrate our faith in Jesus as the Incarnate Word of God and our faith in ourselves as children of God made in his image. As disciples we are stewards of that faith, responsible for making it grow and mature.

OR **"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."** Fear, disbelief, amazement and reassurance are just some of the emotions the disciples experienced when they saw Jesus walking toward their boat on the wind tossed waters of the Sea of Galilee. It is Peter who speaks to the person on the water. Notice he says, "If it is you . . ." Obviously, he is not sure. But at least he has the courage to ask. Then he says, "command me to come to you..." Peter hopes it is Jesus and he may even have believed it was Jesus. He wants to go to Jesus. But he does not want to take the responsibility for stepping out of the boat in the event he is wrong. He wants Jesus to "command" him so if he fails it is Jesus' fault. Before we judge Peter and the other disciples too harshly we should reflect on our reaction when we sense Jesus is calling us, through his presence in the midst of turmoil and uncertainty, to step out of our comfort zone into a strange or risky situation. Do we have the faith, hope and courage to do so without being "commanded" by Jesus? Are we willing to be responsible for our faith?

AUGUST 19/20, 2017

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. In today's second reading, St. Paul tells the Romans, "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." To what is God calling me today? What gifts are mine to share?
2. A hallmark of Christian stewardship is hospitality: welcoming, being inclusive, and making time for others. This is the demand of the Lord in all three of today's readings: whether those others are "foreigners", "Gentiles", "Jews", or a "Canaanite woman." There is a temptation to exclude others who are not of our faith, race, economic status or political persuasion. As Christ's stewards, how are we welcoming others, offering kindness and being inclusive? Do we treat people as "insiders" or "outsiders?"

OR In today's first reading, the Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah during a time of political dissolution and moral decline. The prophet had warned of God's judgment against people for the feelings of self-importance they found in their possessions, and condemned them for various forms of economic injustice such as exploiting the poor and immigrants. Good stewards know that Isaiah's message is as compelling today as it was in the time of the kingdom of Judah: Do the right thing. Offer justice and compassion toward others. Be honest in all your dealings. And remember to observe the day of the Lord.

3. ***"Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."*** Terah took his son Abram and the rest of his family from Ur in Chaldea [Iraq] north to Haran [Turkey]. Then God instructed Abram to take his family south to Canaan. The descendants of Abram [Abraham] moved into Canaan and capture their land. That caused an enduring animosity between the Canaanites and the Israelites. It is in this context we must understand what appears to be a harsh reaction of Jesus to the plea of the Canaanite woman, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David!" Jesus does not ignore or reject the woman. His response tests her faith and the faith of his disciples. Is the woman sincere in her belief or is she testing Jesus? Do his disciples truly believe he is the "Son of David"? When she persists, Jesus says to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." The life of Jesus on this earth began when another woman of great faith said, "May it be done unto me according to your word." Do we truly believe that faith can accomplish great things? Do we act like we believe?

OR ***"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."*** Jesus speaks to the Canaanite (gentile) woman who approached Him for help in a way we might consider harsh. She was not deterred by His initial rebuff. She persisted because she wanted help for her daughter. Jesus noted that He was sent to the house of Israel that failed to recognize Him as the Messiah because of unfounded expectations. He sees in a non-Israelite woman the faith that was lacking in the house of Israel. The woman had no such expectations. She had a personal encounter with Jesus; she saw what he did and believed what he said. She knew she could turn to Him and He could help her daughter. Jesus proclaims that she is a person of great faith and her wish will be fulfilled. What is the nature of our faith in Jesus, unfounded expectations that are an obstacle to true belief in Him or a personal relationship with Him as Messiah and Lord? Will Jesus tell us "Great is your faith; let it be done for you as you wish"?

AUGUST 26/27, 2017

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

1. In today's reading, St. Paul reminds the Romans – and us – that all things come from God: "For from Him and through Him and for Him all things are." Good stewards understand that *all* is gift and share generously the gifts of time, talent, and treasure with which they've been blessed.
2. In today's reading the Lord gave to the steward, Eliakim, the key to the house of David. Jesus bequeathed to Peter stewardship over the kingdom of heaven by handing him the "keys." As the Lord's stewards, we too have been given the "key" to the mysteries of God. It is appropriate to reflect: Do we use this key to open up for others our doors to reveal God's wisdom and knowledge, beauty and mercy, generosity and love? Or do we use our "key" to close the door, shut people out, withhold, forbid, and deprive s of sharing Christ that is active and present within us?

OR Saint Paul reminds us in today's second reading that the ultimate origin of everything is God. Since everything comes from God, we are God's own. We can never put God in our debt. There is absolutely no negotiating with God. Every breath we take is a gift. Every good deed we perform is grace.

Good stewards realize they are created and called to make the beauty, greatness, compassion, and justice of God and his gifts known throughout the world. The stewardship question for us is whether we are willing to embrace this call, acknowledge our dependence on God and give our lives over to him completely for this purpose.

3. ***"But who do you say that I am?"*** Jesus retreats with his disciples to the forested hills and refreshing streams of the region near Caesarea Philippi (in Syria) for some private time with them to reflect on what they have seen and heard. After asking what others say about him, he asks his disciples "But who do you say that I am?" Despite religious, social and family influences that prevented others from recognizing the Messiah, Simon Peter accepts responsibility for his own faith and declares, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus uses the occasion to give Peter (The Rock) responsibility for preserving and passing on that faith to others. As a consequence of our baptism we each have a share in the responsibility for preserving and passing on that faith. That requires a mature and constantly growing faith. A simple test: How would we answer Jesus if he asked, "But who do you say that I am?" What would we say to other who ask, "Who is Jesus?"

OR ***"But who do you say that I am?"*** It is Peter who responds to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." We tend to take Peter's response for granted. Surely, after all he had heard and seen it was obvious that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. Before we get too much exercise jumping to conclusions, let us examine the implications of Peter's response. Peter was not just a fisherman. He was in the fishing business with his brother Andrew and Zebedee, father of James and John. Fishing was a relatively lucrative trade. Peter was a substantial member of his community. When Jesus asks "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" other disciples waltz around the question. But when Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answers with a statement of faith that many, particularly the Jewish leaders, considered to be heresy and could put at risk Peter's financial security, his family and his life. Such faith is a gift from God. He wants all of us to have it. But, like Peter, we must choose to accept, proclaim and live our faith.