

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

4 Pentecost
June 8, 2008
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Your Faith Has Made You Well!”

There is a theme that runs through today’s reading and it is ‘Faith.’ From the faith of Abraham in the Old Testament, to the faith of the woman, who touches the fringe of Jesus’ cloak, faith is depicted as an absolute belief in the power of God to make things better.

Faith we all too often take for granted, until the day when we truly believe that we need it. We need faith today more than ever. With oil rising on Friday to \$139 a barrel and gas slated to rise to \$6 a gallon by the end of June. With no end to war in sight, it is surely time to pray for America, pray for the poor, the afflicted, and those who mourn the loss of a loved one. We must pray for faith, that God will see us through to better days and that those better days will encourage all of us to cherish the grace God gives us.

Abraham is already advanced in years when God challenges him to leave his native land and walk in risk. Because he does what God commands, Abraham is forever after, thought of as the Father of Israel and the first name on every Jew’s lips, “The God of our father Abraham.”

Today’s reading does have that clear lesson that sometimes, what God is asking of us may indeed seem strange and even contradictory. It is as if we are only seeing things from our own perspective. But God, who sees all, sees the bigger picture. He sees the whole tapestry of our lives, the ups and downs, the highs and lows. Only when we find a quiet prayerful moment alone, do we sometimes look back at our lives and see the times the road divided, and we had to make a decision, a decision that changed the course of our lives forever.

Some days I ponder about people who came into my life for a very short time, yet their contribution, small or great had long lasting implications.

Sometimes we recognize when God is taking a hand. Sometimes we do not. A birth, a death, the sudden illness of a friend; they are events that change us. We have to find the time for that reflection, it is real prayer, it is a listening prayer and in it God is speaking to us.

Paul in the letter to the Romans is writing way into the night. He too is pondering the will of God and how he works. Paul isolates Abraham’s faith as the one ingredient we too need in order to allow God’s plan to come alive in our lives.

It is difficult for us to think that God in any way needs us in order for his plan to in any way succeed. Yet throughout the old and new testaments God constantly uses the most unlikely people for tasks that are away beyond their ability.

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Noah, as we saw last week, is a crazy man who builds a boat in the desert. Moses is the spokesman of the Israelites with a speech impediment. David is a shepherd boy with a slingshot, setting out to fight a giant killing machine. Jeremiah is a mere five feet one, with a bad temper and the ability to find and pick a fight in a temple. Yet God uses each and every one.

As if to prove this as a standing rule in the way God uses the most unlikely people, Jesus in today's Gospel tells Matthew, the taxman, to follow him. This is the equivalent of Donald Trump announcing that he is retiring from Casinos to continue Mother Teresa's work in Calcutta, India. Matthew is despised by his fellow countrymen and townsfolk.

Yet, Matthew goes on to play a key part in those early years of Christ's church. Matthew's Gospel becomes the main means that the message and teaching of Jesus is communicated to his native people. In that same Gospel today Jesus chooses to reward one woman's faith by curing her from her life threatening disease. Then he cures the faith of his own Apostles and followers by raising the little girl from the dead.

What is Christ asking of each one of us in our lives today? How can we know? Perhaps, we will live out the next thirty years only to discover that he was knocking and hammering on the door of our awareness, but we could not hear him.'

The Beatitudes that Matthew wrote about four chapters ago in his Gospel are still calling to us for response. The poor are still with us as anyone who works the Food Pantry Friday night will testify. People still die in our midst and we still have people grieving. All around us we have those who hunger and thirst, that in need of mercy in our prison. We need peacemakers and those who heal conflict and war.

We can and will never hear Christ calling and God's plan for each one of us, until we decide to stop. Stop the endless activity and reflect and pray. Don't you yourself hate it when a company is so busy they put you on hold? Or someone phones you to talk and then put you on hold while they take another call? I always hang up. They phone back in five minutes and say: "We must have been disconnected." I always say: "No, I hung up."

Are we in danger of putting God on hold as if time for prayer, reflection and Bible study is an inconvenience that gets in the way of our life? "Sorry God, I know you need to speak to me, but can I put you on hold, I have a call from Philly?"

What if God gets mad and decides to speak to us person to person, you know face to face? "I think we got cut off." "No I cut your life cord, you are dead" says God.

We seriously need to get back to prayer and time for God. Seriously as a church we cannot keep on running our faith on empty. Our lives and our relationship with the Lord are too

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important for that. Gas may be going up and up, but the price of God's grace is the same. It is pre-paid.

We need that grace; we need to have that bond and that close relationship with God. There is such a strong connection between today's Gospel and Abraham in the Old Testament.

Matthew is telling: Don't you see there is but one plan. It is God's plan and you are part of it. What are you going to do? How am I going to convince you?

First that Jesus chose a sinner like me. Second he cured this woman with a blood disorder and if that is not enough he raises a child from the dead. Now, will you believe? Now will you have faith? Now will you turn back to God? What are you going to do?

We worship because we belong to the one true god. We come to his table because we need to be spiritually fed. We build our relation with Christ, because he was chosen us to follow him and serve his Gospel, to do that we need his grace.

He only asks of us one hour in our week. Bill Clinton comes to town and people are in line an hour before he arrives. God our Father invites us to his holy house and we turn up late or some weeks not at all.

I think of faith like a mountain stream. You keep damming it up and soon the water dries up and with it our faith. We need to feed the stream. We need to read the word of God. We need to pray. We need to volunteer to do God's work. We need to give from the many gifts he gives us including our time. For Christ has told us that there "will come a time when no man can work."

Let us not be caught unaware when it comes to our religious duties. Three days before his sudden death Richard Vernon sat in my office and said: "I would just hate to stand before my God on my judgment day and know that I had not done my best."

Judgment day is there for each and every one of us. Let us grow our faith strong that Christ's words to the Gospel woman will be the words she uses to us also: "Take heart, for your faith has made you well"

Amen+

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