

## **DEACON JACK RHINE'S HOMILIES – Section 1**

(Deacon at Our Lady of Grace Church, Palm Bay, Florida)

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1. **Second Sunday of Easter**, Cycle B  
Acts 4:32-35, 1 John 5:1-6, John 20:19-31

The readings today flow together extremely well. The second reading defines family as all of God's creations. The first reading tells us how the members of the early church loved each other, their family, so much that they willingly sold everything they had and used the proceeds for the common good. Finally, in the Gospel, God commissions Jesus and therefore us to go out into the world, to do his work, to spread his love among our family wherever they may be. Such a simple message, yet so profound.

The second reading connects love in our biological families directly with the love between humans and God. It links us into one large family with God as the Father and all of human creation as brothers and sisters.

Just as a child loves his or her parents, brothers and sisters, so should children of God love their brothers and sisters.

The love of each of us for the other members of the Body of Christ is meant to extend in both directions. A. E. Brooke, a British theologian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century author said, "Everyone who has been born of God must love those who have been similarly ennobled." In other words, we are not only born to love, but we are born to be loved.

Sometimes, it seems like a tall order to love members of our families when they are not at their best or we are not at our best. Yet, John tells us that God's commandments, in general, are not heavy loads. This includes the commandment to love one another.

This doesn't mean that obedience to God's commandments is easy to achieve. It is not ever easy to love people that we don't like, people who hurt us physically, emotionally or spiritually. Living together with family can be difficult, but living together in the world according to the Christian standard of life is a daunting task.

Yet, we have been told that God will never give us more than we can handle. God does not hand us commandments and then leave us on our own to figure out how to fulfill them. Each time we respond positively to a commandment of God, we show our love for God. Whether we love members of our biological family, or members of the family of humanity, we are showing love for God. When we love God, love is never a burden.

There is an old story that illustrates how love turns burdens into freedom. In days before busses were provided for transportation, a stranger once met a boy going to school. The boy was carrying a smaller boy on his back who was clearly physically challenged and unable to walk on his own. The stranger asked the boy, "Do you carry him to school every day?" The boy replied, "Yes." The stranger replied, "That must be a heavy burden for you to carry." The boy replied, "He's not a burden, he's my brother."

This story may have been the inspiration for a song made popular in 1970 by a group called "The Hollies," He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother. In many of the various recordings of this song, it is difficult to understand all of the words. I want to read these words to you, they are more than words, they are a beautiful, inspirational poem about God's love and hopes for human relationship.

The road is long, with many a winding turn that will lead us to  
who knows where, who knows when. But, I'm strong, strong  
enough to carry him. He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

So on we go, his welfare is my concern. No burden is he for me to bear, we'll get there. For I know, he would not encumber me. He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

If I'm ladened at all, I'm ladened with sadness. That, everyone's heart isn't filled with the gladness of love for one another.

It's a long, long road, from which there is no return. While we're on the way to there, why not share? And the load doesn't weigh me down at all. He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

These beautiful and powerful words are our calling from God to carry each other. We carry each other through all acts of love and caring. These actions on our part are most powerful because they illustrate the love of God to others in a powerful and human way. When we show God's love, not only can it be healing, it is instructive. It sets an example for others to follow.

The early Christian Community certainly got the point about carrying each other. They so understood that they went out and sold all of their belongings for money to use for the common good. They did this on their own, voluntarily, not at the command of an individual or the Church. It was an overwhelming and spontaneous act of love.

In the Gospel, God sent Jesus forth to show his love in the world and likewise Jesus sends us forth. The Church needs Jesus as her message. But, Jesus needs us to carry on the work that he started. Jesus is dependent upon us, the church, to be the Good News in everyday life. Being the Good News does not mean that we must achieve the spectacular, nor does it mean that we have to martyr ourselves.

What we must do is our best to carry each other through daily life. How we do that is going to be different for each of us depending on our capabilities and our circumstances. But it will always involve love in some fashion.

As we listen to a version of He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother where the words can be understood, let us discern how God is calling us to love and how we can answer that call.

## 2. ALL SOULS DAY

Today, the Church celebrates **All Souls Day** to commemorate those who have gone before us. The tradition of commemoration of the dead reaches back into Judaism. The legend connected with the foundation of All Souls Day is that St. Odilo of Cluny, a pilgrim returning from the Holy Land, ended up on a desolate island as the result of a storm. A hermit living there told him that amid the rocks was a chasm communicating with purgatory, where one could hear the groans of tortured souls. The hermit also claimed he had heard the demons complaining that the prayers of the faithful, and especially the monks of Cluny, were insufficient to get the dead to heaven. When Odilo got back to Cluny, he informed the abbot of what he heard. The abbot designated All Souls Day a day of intercession on the part of his community for all the souls in Purgatory.

All Souls Day became better known and more widespread in the 11th Century as it became communicated through France. In the 14th Century, the Church added All Souls Day to its calendar and fixed the date of November 2nd.

The Church continues to teach that purgatory exists to prepare imperfect people to enter heaven. There has been much speculation and discussion by theologians over the years as to whether it is a place or a process and other issues like the intensity of punishment and the logistics of entering heaven. Regardless of what happens in purgatory or how long it takes to be released, praying for a glorious afterlife for our deceased loved ones and all of the people of God is a natural consequence of being Catholic Christians.

All Souls Day also puts us in touch with our own transition to eternal life. We are part of a cycle that has continued since the dawn of time; a cycle of birth, life, death and eternal life. We do not regard death as another life, but as a progression, or a change, in the same life. In the future, many years into the future for some and not so many years into the future for others, we will have descendants in church praying for us as we are praying for our beloved deceased tonight.

In John's Gospel, we are assured that we will be with God in one of the many dwellings that Jesus says he has prepared for us. Sometimes, we are like our twin, Thomas, and question what is really in store for us after death. Jesus very firmly responds to Thomas' doubts saying that he is the one who will take us to the Father.

Thomas likely shared many of our own concerns about death. Certainly Thomas experienced the loss of family and friends in his life and asked himself the same questions and shared the same feelings of fear and sorrow that we do when we encounter death of a beloved. Like us, he must have wondered how he would recover from the loss of someone he loved.

We know that life is too precious to end without a trace and that we are confronting an indeterminate separation from our loved ones. We are also assured that we will be united again in eternal life. Although death is one of the most serious unknowns that we will encounter in our lives, our faith teaches us that it is not an end, but a transition. It is not a break in existence, but a transformation.

We believe that when the hour of our death arrives and our existence on this earth is ended, we won't face nothingness but will face our loving God who welcomes us and converts death to life in his heavenly kingdom. Only God can answer the question of how long we will be separated from those who have gone before us.

The human condition is that we are fearful of the unknown. That is why it is said that everyone wants to go to heaven but no one is in a hurry to get there. Arthur Gordon, an American publisher and author of stories of faith and family for publications such as *Guideposts*, tells a beautiful story about the process of death.

A long time ago lived a little boy whose parents had died. He was taken in by an aunt who raised him as her own child. Years later, after he had grown up and left his aunt, he received a letter from her. She had a terminal illness and, from the tone of her letter, he knew she was afraid of death.

The man she had raised and touched wrote a letter to her in which he said: It is now thirty five years since I, a little boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word that you would give me a home and be a mother to me. I've never forgotten the day when I made the long ten mile journey to your house. I can still recall the disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant Caesar to fetch me. I still remember my tears and anxiety as, perched high on the horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home.

Night fell before we finished the journey, and as it became dark, I became even more afraid. "Do you think she'll go to bed before I get there?" I asked Caesar anxiously. "Oh, No," said Caesar, "she's sure to stay up for you. When we get out of these woods you will see her light shining in the windows."

Presently, we did ride out into the clearing and there was your light. I remember that you were waiting at the door; that you put your arms tight around me; that you lifted me – a tired frightened little boy – down from the horse. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room. You heard me say my prayers. Then you sat with me until I fell asleep.

You probably realize why I am trying to recall this to your memory now. Very soon, God is going to send for you, and take you to a new home. I am trying to tell you that you needn't be afraid of the summons, or of the strange journey, or of the dark messenger of death. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you did for me many years ago.

At the end of the road, you will find love and a welcome waiting. And you will be safe in God's care. I am going to watch and pray for you until you are out of sight. And, I will wait for the same day when I make the same journey myself and find you waiting at the end of the road to greet me.

It is in the celebration of All Souls Day that we realize that we are part of the cycle of life and everlasting life and the Gospel that that tells us that we don't have to fear death and that a loving God will be waiting for us at the end of the road that brings us to eternal life.

### 3. CHRISTMAS – and afterwards – Homily

December 25 has come and gone. The radio stations that have been playing Christmas music since Thanksgiving are back to their normal fare. Christmas trees are in the gutter waiting to be picked up by the garbage man on the first garbage day after Christmas.

Stores that have been decorated for Christmas since Halloween have changed their décor. Yet we are not even halfway through the 12 days of Christmas, which end on January 6th. Christmas just begins with the welcoming of the Christ child on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

We live in a predominately Christian country. It is sad that Americans treat the Christmas season as one large shopping trip. A major economic indicator is retail sales during the gift giving season. The poor sales this year get the large headlines while little coverage is given to the acts of love that people do for one another, which are more in line with the reason for the season.

It is curious that while our American society neglects the other eleven days of Christmas, we are sticklers for the seven games of the World Series, the nine innings of a baseball game, the four quarters of a football game and all of the other symbols of American culture that dominate our lives. Yet our American Jewish sisters and brothers take the eight days of Passover and the eight days of Hanukah seriously. Our American Muslim brothers and sisters strictly observe the month of Ramadan, which involves significant daily sacrifice. Yet, most of us ignore the other eleven days of Christmas, a joyful and holy season where we celebrate God giving us his only son to live among us in a troubled and conflicting world.

An unknown author wrote a piece called Mary's Dream. I would like to share it with you:

"I had a dream, Joseph. I don't understand it, not really, but I think it was about a birthday celebration for our son. I think that is what it was all about. For six weeks, the people had been preparing for it. They had decorated the house and bought new clothes. They had gone shopping many times and bought elaborate gifts. It was peculiar, though, because

the presents weren't for our son. They wrapped them in beautiful paper and tied them with lovely bows and stacked them under a tree.

"Yes, a tree, Joseph, right in their house. They decorated the tree also. The branches were full of glowing balls and sparkling ornaments. There was a figure on top of the tree. It looked like an angel might look. Oh, it was beautiful. Everyone was laughing and happy. They were all excited about the gifts. They gave the gifts to each other, Joseph, not to our son. I don't think they even knew him. They never mentioned his name. Doesn't it seem odd for people to go to all of that trouble to celebrate someone's birthday if they don't know him? I had the strangest feeling that if our son had gone to this celebration he would have been intruding.

"Everything was so beautiful, Joseph, and everyone so full of cheer, but it made me want to cry. How sad for Jesus – not to be wanted at his own birthday celebration. I am glad it was only a dream. How terrible, Joseph, if it had been real."

Each of us has to look at ourselves and ask whether it is just a dream or is some of it real in our lives? Do we, even in some small way, take the Christ out of Christmas? Is our Christmas spirit selfish or generous? Is there some balance in giving and receiving in our own celebrations of Christmas?

Today as the days of Christmas continue, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. This is not a commemoration of a huge formal sit down dinner at the Jerusalem Hilton to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but the remembrance of what a Jewish family did to thank God for the birth of a child.

Joseph and Mary were obedient to Jewish customs and took Jesus to the temple. The purpose of the temple visit was twofold: First, to purify Mary after childbirth and second to present Jesus, or any other child, to the community. The custom pertained to any child, not just to the Savior of the world.

If you or I were planning the birth of the Savior of the World would we choose a remote spot like the Middle East far from the center of civilization and government of the time? Would we have the Savior born in a stable to



a poor working class family? Probably not, we would have the Christ child born to royalty and wealth to make his position in the world obvious. But, God had a radically different idea and was trying to show us what was important and what was not important, like wealth and political power. Jesus was born into poverty to love and serve the poor and the outcasts, which he did during the time of his ministry.

His presentation at the temple was just another example of what God saw as important. The normal sacrifice for the purification of the mother after childbirth was a lamb. Joseph and Mary couldn't afford a lamb and scripture tells us that they made the sacrifice of the poor, two turtledoves and two pigeons.

The Holy Family was not welcomed at the temple by the high priest or any other member of the temple establishment. Rather, he was welcomed by Simeon, an old man, and Anna an old woman. Anna and Simeon were among the people waiting for the Messiah to come. Simeon had been hanging around the temple for years waiting to greet the Messiah. He was certain that God would let him see the Messiah before he died. Anna, as far as we know, was homeless and lived on the temple grounds. These "street people" are God's beloved anawim, little ones; people who had nothing material.

Simeon recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and takes him in his arms and proclaimed the words we heard in today's Gospel. "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

These words of scripture are so important to us as Catholics that, since the fourth century, they are part of Night Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. It is prayed daily by priests, deacons, those in religious life and many Catholic Faithful. These words are not only Simeon's declaration that he is ready to go to God because he has seen the Messiah in the Christ child, but they speak to the universality of our Messiah. He came for all of us.

In our lives, we are called to imitate Jesus Christ who came for all. He loved the poor and the outcasts. Jesus loved those that most of us find difficult to love because we don't really see them as people. We see them as less than people for whatever reason. But how can we look down on people like those that God chose to bring Jesus into the world and raise him. How can we deny the humanity of people who recognized Jesus at the temple because they were street people? Jesus told us "whatsoever you do to the least of my people, you do unto me."

So that brings us back to the reason for the season. There is nothing wrong with merchants making a living. There is nothing wrong with nice decorations. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the music of Christmas, even the secular music. There is nothing wrong with giving and receiving nice gifts and enjoying each other at parties. But, does each of us do something for God's beloved anowim, the little people that Jesus too loved?

We should take great pride in what some organizations in our parish community have done this year. With the generous support of many people in our community, our St. Vincent de Paul Society donated many toys to 168 children who may have received little or nothing. Fifty one families were given food for their Christmas dinner. A van load of toys was taken to the Hope Mission School in Indiantown. The Secular Order of the Servants of Mary worked with Operation Hope in the greater community to provide toys for four thousand children of migrant farm workers in Fellsmere. Loaves and Fishes has been feeding lunch to over 60 people during the holiday season. There certainly are many other initiatives by our parishioners who recognize, serve and honor Christ in others.

Let us pray that as we celebrate all twelve days of Christmas, that we include some of the anowim that we know Jesus loves in our hearts and in our actions. Let us pray that Mary's Dream has no reality in our lives. And let us pray that the Eucharist we receive today gives us the strength and grace that Jesus Christ may be born into our hearts 365 days a year and that the way we live our lives will show his presence in us.

#### 4. THE AMAZING PARADOX

Today's Gospel speaks to a contradiction attributed to Jesus that theologians have called "the amazing paradox." The contradiction is that one has to lose their life in order to gain life. A corollary to the contradiction, but really also a definition of the contradiction, is that only with service comes greatness.

These notions were as counter cultural in Christ's day as they are in our day. The Jews, living in and out of exile and slavery, and being battered by invasion after invasion and occupation after occupation believed that being masters of the land would bring them the good life.

In our own time, power, possessions, security and wealth are the signs of the good life. Most would agree that it is better to have servants than to be a servant.

Yet, the words of Jesus call us to something very different, very much counter to the world's values today. The example of the wheat in the Gospel is a great illustration of the amazing paradox. The kernels of wheat cannot sustain life in their living form. They only become valuable when they are harvested, ground and cooked. The wheat fulfills its purpose when it is used to serve the needs of others. We are serving God only when we are serving the needs of others. Christmas Evans, a Welsh evangelist of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century said in regards to service, "it is better to burn out than to rust out."

I'd like to tell you a story about the great paradox written by Walter Wangerin Jr., a theologian and Lutheran minister. This story not only speaks to the Gospel but to this season, and to our entire lives as followers of Christ. The name of this story is **The Ragman.**

Early before dawn one Friday morning, I noticed a young man, handsome and strong, walking down the alleys of our city. He was pulling

an old cart filled with clothes both bright and new, and he was calling in a clear, tenor voice, "Rags! Rags! New rags for old! I'll take your tired rags!"

Now this is a wonder, I thought to myself, for the man stood six feet-four, and his arms were like tree limbs, hard and muscular, and his eyes flashed intelligence. Could he find no better job than this, to be a ragman in the inner city? I followed him. My curiosity drove me. And I wasn't disappointed.

Soon the Ragman saw a woman sitting on her back porch. She was sobbing into a handkerchief, sighing and shedding a thousand tears. Her knees and elbows made a sad X. Her shoulders shook. Her heart was breaking.

The Ragman stopped his cart. Quietly, he walked to the woman, stepping around the tin cans, dead toys, and Pampers. "Give me your rag," he said so gently, "and I'll give you another." He slipped the handkerchief from her eyes. She looked up and he laid across her palm a linen cloth so clean and new that it shone. She blinked from the gift to the giver.

Then, as he began to pull his cart again, the Ragman did a strange thing. He put her stained handkerchief to his own face and then he began to weep, to sob as grievously as she had done, his shoulders shaking. Yet she was left without a tear.

This is a wonder, I breathed to myself, and I followed the sobbing Ragman like a child who cannot turn away from mystery. "Rags! Rags! New rags for old!"

In a little while, when the sky showed gray behind the rooftops, the Ragman came upon a girl whose head was wrapped in a bandage, whose eyes were empty. Blood soaked her bandage. A single line of blood ran down her cheek. Now the Ragman looked upon this child with pity, and he drew a lovely yellow bonnet from his cart.

"Give me your rags," he said, tracing his own line on her cheek, "and I'll give you mine." The child could only gaze at him while he loosened the bandage, removed it, and tied it to his own head. The bonnet he set on hers. And I gasped at what I saw: for with the bandage went the wound! Against his brow ran a darker, more substantial blood, his own!

"Rags! Rags! I take old rags!" cried the sobbing, bleeding, strong, intelligent Ragman. The Ragman seemed more and more now to hurry.

"Are you going to work?" he asked a man who leaned against a telephone pole. The man shook his head.

The Ragman pressed him. "Do you have a job?" "Are you crazy?" sneered the other. He pulled away from the pole, revealing the right sleeve of his jacket, flat, the cuff stuffed into the pocket. He had no arm.

"So," said the Ragman, "give me your jacket, and I'll give you mine." Such quiet authority in his voice.

The one armed man took off his jacket. So did the Ragman and I trembled at what I saw: for the Ragman's arm stayed in the sleeve, and when the other put it on, he had two good arms, thick as tree limbs, but the Ragman had only one. "Go to work," he said.

After that he found a drunk, lying unconscious beneath an army blanket, an old man, hunched, wizened, and sick. He took the blanket and wrapped it round himself, but for the drunk he left new clothes.

And now I had to run to keep up with the Ragman, though he was weeping uncontrollably and bleeding freely at the forehead, pulling his cart with one arm and stumbling for drunkenness, falling again and again, exhausted, old, and sick, yet he went with terrible speed.

On spider's legs he skittered through the alleys of the city, this mile and the next, until he came to its limits and then he rushed beyond.

I wept to see the change in this man. I hurt to see his sorrow. And yet I needed to see where he was going in such haste, perhaps even to discover what drove him so.

The little old Ragman finally came to a landfill. He came to the garbage pits. And then I wanted to help him in what he did, but I hung back, hiding. He climbed a hill. With tormented labor he cleared a little space on that hill. Then he sighed. He lay down. He pillowed his head on a handkerchief and a jacket. He covered his bones with an army blanket. And then he died.

Oh, how I cried to witness that death! I slumped in a junked car and wailed and mourned as one who has no hope because I had come to love the Ragman. I sobbed myself to sleep.

I did not know, how could I know, that I slept through Friday night and Saturday and its night too. But then, on Sunday, I was awakened by a violent light. Light, pure, hard, demanding light, slammed against my sleeping face and I blinked and I looked and I saw the last and first wonder of all. There was the Ragman folding the blanket most carefully, a scar on his forehead but alive! And, besides that, so healthy! There was no sign of sorrow or of age, and all the rags he had gathered shined for cleanliness.

Well, I lowered my head and, trembling for all that I had seen, I myself got out of the junk car and walked to the Ragman. I told him my name with shame, for I was a sorry figure next to him. Then I stripped myself of everything and I said to him with yearning in my voice, "Dress me. Make me new again!"

He dressed me, my Lord. He put new rags on me and I am a wonder beside him. The Ragman! The Ragman! The Christ!

To be fully alive, we are challenged to be as open to conversion as the story teller and as willing to serve as the ragman.

## 5. DISCIPLESHIP

In the Gospel we heard this morning, Jesus calls Simon Peter to **discipleship**. Simon Peter protests considering himself unworthy. But Jesus shows him that all things are possible through the miracle of bringing in an abundance of fish when they had been able to catch nothing on their own. This Gospel shows us how Jesus made miracles happen and how we too can do the same.

First, there is the eye that sees the possibility of a miracle. There is no need to think that Jesus created a school of fish for the occasion. In the Sea of Galilee there were phenomenal schools that covered the sea as if it was solid for as much as an acre. Most likely Jesus saw just such a school and his keen sight made it look like a miracle. We need the eye that really sees.

Many people saw steam raise the lid of a kettle; only James Watt went on to think of a steam engine. Many people saw an apple fall; only Isaac Newton went on to think out the law of gravity. The earth is full of miracles for the eye that sees.

Second, there is the spirit within that will make an effort. If Jesus said to do so, tired as he was, Peter was prepared to try again. For many of us, the disaster of life is that we give up just one effort too soon.

Finally, there is the spirit within that will attempt what seems hopeless. The night was past and that was the prime time for fishing. All the circumstances were unfavorable, but Peter said, "Let circumstances be what they may, if you say so, we will try again."

Too often we wait because we think that the time is not right. If we wait for a perfect set of circumstances, we may never begin at all. If we want a miracle, we must take Jesus at his word when he calls us to attempt the impossible.

We are capable of being miracle coworkers with Jesus. We may not consider ourselves to be worthy, but that does not matter. When it comes right down to it, only Jesus is truly worthy. But, by answering his call, we can do the impossible.

Jesus was obviously able to convince Simon Peter and James and John that miracles were possible. They dropped their nets, followed Jesus and became fishers of people. They were ordinary, everyday folk, not great rabbis, not high power intellectuals of the time. Just regular people like us who saw the potential miracles by answering the call of Jesus.

We hear that same call from Jesus this morning to drop what we are doing, look for the possibilities for miracles waiting to happen, try time after time regardless of failure and take risks to become fishers of people in his name.



## 6. THE MAN BORN BLIND

**I once was blind but now I see**", said the man born blind. "Do we see?" is the question that we need to ask ourselves.

The man that was born blind was healed, not once but twice. One healing was physical. The man opened his eyes and he could see for the first time in his life. There was also a second healing, a healing of faith. The man saw Jesus for the first time and saw him as the Son of God.

Let's take a look at the players in this story. First, there was the man who was born blind. He had lived his life without vision. He probably had a comfortable routine, going each day and sitting by the side of the road and being supported by the charity of others.

Being able to see would change this man's life considerably. He would have to find a new way to earn a living. He was courageous enough to go where he had never been, to put his faith in this man Jesus who the religious authorities despised. He listened to Jesus, and when Jesus put mud on his eyes and told him to go wash it off in the pool of Siloam, he didn't question Jesus. His faith called him to go to the pool and wash. When the Pharisees questioned him, he stood up to them.

Then there were the blind man's parents. They denied knowledge of his healing. They were cowards. They were afraid that the Pharisees would find a reason to excommunicate them, to cut them off from their fellow humans and cut them off from God.

The Jews of Jesus' time believed that suffering came from sin, the sin of the individual or the sin of the person's parents. These parents were indifferent to their own son. They refused to take a stand to support their own son in because they wanted to protect themselves.

Finally, there were the Pharisees. Jesus threatened them because they did not understand the source of his power. They could not refute the scripturally based testimony of the man who could now see so they abused him, and accused him of being guilty of prenatal sin, and they insulted him.

Finally the Pharisees bullied him, removing him from their presence by force.

We might just let it go by when people in our company spread malicious rumors about others or make statements that are prejudicial or ethnic stereotypes. Are we afraid to rock the boat when the boat requires rocking?

Do we act like the Pharisees? Do we reject what we don't understand? We may insist that our way is the only way or insist we are right when we know we are not, or use our religious beliefs to judge others because they do not live exactly the way that we want them to.

Or do we act like the man born blind? Are we willing to listen to Jesus and do what he calls us to even if means taking risks and doing what is uncomfortable? Do we proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God in our words and actions?

Lent is a good time for us to see in a new way, to think about which characters in this story we resemble. Being human, each of us has some sort of spiritual blindness, some behavior or way of thinking that may be like that of the parents or of the Pharisees. Thomas Wilson, a sixteenth century theologian and philosopher said, "The greatest of all disorders is to think that we are whole and need no help." We all have some area for growth and improvement.

How do we act like the parents of the man born blind? Do we put ourselves first at the expense of others and avoid seeing injustice in the world around us?

## 7. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room, he said to them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” In that simple sentence, Jesus established **the mission of the Church**; to continue doing his work in the world. Jesus established an interdependent relationship between us --- the church --- and himself. Jesus needs us to keep doing his work but we need Jesus’ authority and power to go out into the world and do his work. Without Jesus, the Church has no message, no mission. We are sent by Jesus to do his work much as Jesus was sent by God.

One of our tasks in following Jesus is to bring other people to belief in Jesus. It is not likely that people will be motivated to follow Jesus unless they believe that Jesus is God, sent by the father to teach us how to live so that we may be builders of the Kingdom. Jesus himself had problems getting people to believe. Thomas, was a man who needed hard evidence in order to believe. He had to feel Jesus’ wounds to believe that Jesus had really risen. The name Thomas means “twin.” Scripture does not mention his biological brother or sister that could be his twin. You have heard the expression “doubting Thomas.” We are all doubting Thomases in one way or another. It is part of the human condition. But when Thomas finally came to believe, he gave his whole heart and soul.

When we do the work that Jesus calls us to do, we too encounter doubting Thomases. Like Jesus, we need some way to prove that he is alive and in our midst. Jesus had miracles attributed to him, and in the early Church, as we heard in the first reading from Acts, there were healings on a regular basis. The early Church was an effective Church. Many events happened that made sick people healthy and bad people good.

Although modern medicine has taken over much of the healing ministry that was in the forefront of the early church, we are still called to be healers, to be peacemakers, to do the right thing, to love one another, to minister to the vulnerable, and to be examples of people who try to avoid sin.

In other words, we are to live a way of life that mirrors Jesus’ mission in our families, in our workplaces and in our communities.

To consistently live Christ’s mission in our lives is not easy, especially in a world with an abundance of evil, violence, exploitation of others and selfishness; a world having values that are not in harmony with Christ’s call.

Jesus left us with a gift that nourishes us with his strength and courage and wisdom. It is a gift that makes Christ's presence among us, and in us, real; a reality that transforms our lives and helps us to encourage others to transform their lives.

Rembert Weakland, the now retired archbishop of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, wrote a vision paper in 1997 for the year 2000 entitled "Eucharist Without Walls." In that paper Weakland says that every parish must be made Eucharist without walls. He says, "If only we could let the living presence of Christ, like a living electric force, stretch out to cover the land with goodness. Christ did not expect his church to be a body of perfect people, but to help all in need – to bring forgiveness to sinners, love to the lonely, strength and courage to the weak, food and shelter to the needy and hope to the discouraged. The Eucharist nourishes a pilgrim people, not an enclosed complacent colony of the self contented."

He goes on to say. "Eucharist without walls means we struggle to bring Christ to every act of our day, every doubt, every wish, every effort of unselfishness. We also realize that we have no monopoly on the action of the Spirit and often are encouraged, not only by the nourishment we bring, but by the Spirit out ahead of us. We rejoice in God's presence in the world and others and say that it is good."

It is when we become Eucharist without walls as a parish and individuals, that we truly show the love of Christ. Even the most stubborn doubting Thomases can see that Christ is alive and well in our world.

Weakland goes on to address specific age groups and other groups of people within the Church. He addresses all of us as we face the world we live in saying, "The challenge we face today is how to bring Christ to the culture around us – to our families, to the market place, to our leisure activities as we try to be Christians in the world. It is a special challenge to us to reflect in our lives the faith we profess. Mass on Sunday should change how we act on Monday. We should ask God for the grace of being attentive to bringing Christ to all those around us. We must make sure that our actions are motivated by the Gospels and by a deep commitment to our faith in Jesus Christ. We have to do more than talk about our faith, we must live it."

Christ's mission is not only to be Eucharist in the world, but to help others learn how to be Eucharist.

In conclusion, there is a story about Jesus' return to heaven. When he arrived, God asked him if he completed his mission on earth. Jesus replied, "No, father, I have not, but I have left a group of capable men and women to complete my work." God then said, "Jesus, what is your alternate plan should these men and women fail?" Jesus replied, "Father, I have no other plan."

## 8. The Story of Danielle and Human Trafficking

Danielle was a third year university student. She got very high grades, participated in sports, was active in her church and was a popular and beautiful young woman. She regularly studied in a local coffee shop and one day a couple in their forties came in and sat down at Danielle's table and struck up a conversation with her. They were very congenial and asked a lot of questions about her life; her name, home town, the kind of man she liked and others. They said goodbye and left.

Several weeks later, as she was studying in the coffee shop, a man approached her. He was her dream man, the man she described in the conversation with the couple. Joe struck up a conversation and she found that he liked the same things she did. They talked for hours and she accepted his invitation to a party. She remembered having a good time at the party and then she woke up in a room with a number of men and I will leave it to your imagination what happened. Joe told Danielle that he had pictures and would post them on Facebook and would hurt her family if she didn't work for him.

Over the coming months, her grades declined, she wanted nothing to do with athletics and she neglected her appearance. She was depressed and didn't see any point in going to church. Her friend Sue took an interest in Danielle's situation. Danielle finally took Sue into her confidence and disclosed what Joe had been doing to her. Sue convinced Danielle to go to the police. Joe was arrested and prosecuted. Even with professional help, it took Danielle a long time to get her confidence and self-respect back as well as trust for others. Danielle finally finished school and now counsels other human trafficking victims. With help from Sue and others, Danielle was brought back from spiritual and emotional death to new life.

The readings today share the theme of new life. In the first reading from the prophet Ezekiel, the dry bones that God is breathing life into are not dead bodies, but an emotionally and spiritually dead nation of Jewish people who are in exile. God promises to put his spirit back into them and restore their nation to them. In the second reading, Paul offers the same hope given by Ezekiel. He emphasizes that you cannot live in the spirit when there is sin present. That sin may be one's own personal sin, or sin perpetrated on a person by another as was the case in Danielle's story.

Gospel stories have great spiritual value both in the time of Jesus and today. God acted powerfully through the life of Jesus by turning darkness into light, despair into hope and death into life. As Christians, we believe that God acts today, often through people such as ourselves, turning dark and hopeless situations from despair to life and hope. In Danielle's story, Sue was God's instrument that led her out of the darkness and dysfunction of her life into wholeness.

Obviously, we are all not medical doctors who can bring people back from the brink of death to life. Most of us are not schooled in or capable of extraordinary actions. But, what we can do is provide love, caring, friendship and listening to a hurting human being. Before we can be God's instrument in any situation, we need awareness of people we minister to or befriend.

As you may know, the last living Servite friar that served our parish, Fr. Carl Feil, passed away last Sunday. The Servite friars were life giving, each in his own way bringing light of Christ to the people of our parish. Those who experienced the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick with Fr. Carl saw the light of Christ in to his kindness, caring and love.

Today, 40 of us attended a human trafficking awareness day of reflection. We learned about situations such as Danielle's. We learned how to recognize the signs that might indicate something is wrong in the life of a brother or sister. Sue recognized that her friend Danielle had a problem.

One might think that human trafficking does not occur in a place like Palm Bay. But, unfortunately it occurs everywhere. Just last October, a man was arrested by the Palm Bay police for trafficking 24 minors. Most of us thought that slavery ended with the Emancipation Proclamation, but we were wrong. Human trafficking is modern day slavery where people are forced to live in situations against their will.

Many of us, when we hear about human trafficking, believe that it is foreigners imported for the sex trade. That is part of the picture, but human trafficking can hit closer to home as illustrated by Danielle's story. Danielle was someone's daughter, someone's friend and may have been someone's brother or sister. She was a highly functional, attractive,

intelligent, well-adjusted spiritual person with a good life. She lost control of her life through enslavement by an evil person.

Facts about human trafficking are uncomfortable for us to hear, but we need to know them. Sadly, human trafficking has become the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world. It is a 39 billion dollar worldwide business. In the United States 70% of female victims are involved in the sex trade, the other 30% in labor trafficking. Between 100 thousand and 300 thousand American children are caught up in this horrendous life each year and are kept there by control and threat.

Florida has the dubious notoriety of being one of the top three states in the US when it comes to human trafficking. It is all alarming, but most horrendous is the involvement of young girls between the ages of 11 and 15. That is why it is so important that we are aware.

Pope Francis himself rescued more than 80 women from human trafficking while he was a cardinal in Buenos Aires. In a recent discussion with diplomats he said, "It's a disgrace that people are treated as objects, deceived, raped, often sold many times for different purposes and, in the end, killed or, in any case, physically and mentally damaged, ending up thrown away and abandoned." He went on to say that human trafficking is an issue that worries him very much and today as it is threatening people's dignity. Human trafficking is being combatted at all levels of the Church and our government.

It is our calling to be aware of the signs that someone is being trafficked and to understand how to report our suspicions. There will be literature passed out after mass that describes the signs to watch for and who to contact if you suspect a case of human trafficking.

My brothers and sisters, we have received the great commandment to love our neighbors like ourselves. We know that everyone is our neighbor and we are our brother's keeper. We are called to raise others to life as Jesus raised Lazarus.

You may have heard the story about Jesus returning to his Father in heaven. An angel welcomed him home and asked how things went on earth. Jesus replied that he did his best but there was still a great deal of work to do. The angel asked Jesus if he had a plan B. Jesus said no there is no plan B. I left Christians on earth to complete my work on earth.

My sisters and brothers, it is up to us.



## 9. UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

All of the readings and even the psalm this weekend reflect God's call to unconditional love. We believe that we are created in God's image and if God is love, then we are called to be love. Love is not always easy. Jesus' call for us to love our enemies is a real challenge and often we have to make the decision to love, even when we don't want to. Our concept of love is constrained by the fact that there is only one word for love in the English language. We often associate the word love with either physical love, the love we have for our children and parents, or the Valentine's Day kind of love.

If we think of the love that Jesus speaks of in terms of hearts and flowers, fuzzy feelings and warm emotions - the kind of love that is expressed on Valentine's Day - then what God asks of us is impossible. How could we have such love for someone who persecutes us, for someone who bullies and insults us, for someone who acts as our enemy?

The love that is required of Christians is not a feeling but a decision followed by action. We are called to do good even though it is not deserved. It is a matter of not repaying injury with injury, insult with insult, hurt with hurt. It is a matter of deciding that we will act as God acts toward those who make themselves his enemies by their sin and evil. God continues to do good for them.

In May of 2013, Pope Francis said, "You tell us that to love God and neighbor is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, the face of Jesus."

Today's readings show a progression of what it is to understand God's love and how to live it. The reading from the book of Leviticus contains the Hebrew Scripture law that Jesus discusses in the Gospel. This reading from Leviticus did not actually command hatred of one's enemies, although in those times it was common practice to hate your enemies and the enemies of God. The commandment was only "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In the Gospel, Jesus teaches that we must love our enemies, a radical idea for the First Century and a radical teaching for today. Like Jesus' teachings, the commandment of Leviticus is a call to be like God. Leviticus introduces the collection of laws, including the law to

love our neighbor, with “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.” Because we are created in God’s image and God is love, we are called to treat others with the love that God gives to us.

The psalm response proclaims that God is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in mercy and it is a call to action for us to be patient, kind and merciful to others. In the Second Reading, Paul calls us to reject the wisdom of the world and be fools for Christ by loving unconditionally.

We are very aware that in Florida when the sun blazes, its rays heat the oceans and also ourselves and our homes. When it rains, drops of water fall upon the grass and also on the asphalt that covers the street. Sun and rain do not discriminate. Nor, as we have learned from the news of the north and mid-west this winter, snow does not discriminate either! That is equally true of God's love. As Jesus makes clear in the Gospel, God's love is all embracing.

It is that all embracing love Jesus expects his followers to show others, even their enemies. As he says, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father."

As Jesus tells us, God "makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." God blesses the saint and the sinner, the good and the bad, the deserving and the undeserving, the admirable and the detestable. Certainly the ministry of Jesus, where he lived in the company of and love saints and sinners alike is proof of God's all-embracing love and care.

There was an example of people showing God’s love in the news recently. A mother in Miami, named Jessica, was so desperate to feed her hungry family that she was trying to steal a lot of food. Vicki, a police officer, was about to arrest Jessica but changed her mind at the last minute. Instead of arresting her, she bought Jessica a hundred dollars’ worth of groceries because arresting her wasn't going to solve the problem with her children being hungry because there was no food.

The officer says she has no question that what she did was right, “To see them go through the bags when we brought them in, it was like Christmas. That \$100 to me was worth it.” The officer did have one request.

It was that when Jessica got on her feet, that she help someone else out. And Jessica said she would.

The story gets even better. After word got out about what happened people donated another \$700 for Jessica to spend at the grocery store. And then, best of all a local business owner invited her in for an interview and ended up hiring her on the spot as a customer service representative.

Jessica started crying when he told her she was hired, and she said, "There are no words how grateful I am that you took your time and helped somebody out; especially somebody like me." This happened because one police officer decided to love as God does instead of arresting Jessica.

As children of God, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to follow the example set by God. God does not discriminate in doing good. Like God we are not meant to be selective in showing love. God's love shines on all. Jesus tells us, "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect." That does not require hearts and flowers; rather it requires a decision to do good, even for the undeserving. With Lent beginning in ten days, maybe we can all look at our lives and see what changes need to be made for us to be kind, merciful and patient with others.

## 10. **PRESENTATION OF THE LORD**

Today the church celebrates The Presentation of the Lord. And, at this Mass we are also having an early celebration of the Feast of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order. The actual date of the feast is February 17th. The presentation of a child in the temple forty days after their birth was a Jewish custom. So, Jesus was brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph to be presented to God forty days after his birth. The Presentation of the Lord celebrates a manifestation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish peoples' messianic hopes.

The first reading is from the prophet Malachi, whose name means messenger. This book is the last book of Hebrew Scripture and was written at a time when the faith of the Jewish people was low and the priesthood was in disarray. Malachi speaks of purification that will come in a very traumatic way, with sacrifice and suffering, before the coming of the Messiah and serves notice on the Jewish nation that they need to seriously get their act together spiritually.

The second reading continues the theme of suffering and sacrifice. Jesus was sacrificed for the salvation of all of us, suffered and died for us, and he more than anyone understands and has empathy for our own suffering and the sacrifices that we make in our lives. Sacrifices, even when we make them gladly, still involve some degree of suffering.

In the Gospel, Jesus is brought to the temple to be presented to God according to Jewish law. Exodus, Chapter 13 verse 12 says, "You will dedicate to the Lord every newborn that opens the womb; and every first born male of your animals will belong to the Lord." This was done 40 days after Jesus birth as 40 days of purification is required when a woman gives birth to a son.

The presentation required a sacrifice of one lamb and one pigeon. For poor families, such as that of Joseph and Mary, an additional pigeon could be offered as the sacrifice in place of the lamb. The sacrifice was sent to the heavenly realm as a substitute for the child being presented. It should be noted that it was the mother who provided the animals to be sacrificed. Thirty three years later, Mary sacrificed her son for all of us.

It is a good thing that we have a much more enlightened view of sacrifice today. Sacrifice, if it is a gift to God, has to be more than self-denial. We are called to deny ourselves in order to give to God directly, or our sisters and brothers that were made in the image of God.

The prophesy of Simeon foretold to Mary that she would suffer in the future when Jesus would sacrifice his life for all of us by saying, "As for you, a sword will pierce your soul, and all of this will happen so that the inner thoughts of many hearts would be revealed."

The Seven Holy Founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, whose feast we celebrate today, have a direct connection to the prophesy of Simeon. The order, from the time the Seven Founders lived until today reveres the Blessed mother through their devotion to the Seven Sorrows. The Servite Rosary, which differs somewhat from the Dominican Rosary that we most often pray, is the same kind of devotion with Hail Marys, Our Fathers and Glory Bes. Rather than five decades of 10, there are seven of seven, one for each of the Sorrows. The First Sorrow is the prophesy of Simeon in the Temple.

Servites are not a sad bunch of people that wallow in the Sorrows. Those of you who were here when the friars were, know we had some great occasions of fun. But, we revere Mary and her sorrows because we know that she suffered any difficulty or tragedy that any of us have experienced and that she relates to us and comforts us whenever we are suffering or feeling badly.

The Seven Holy Founders of the Servants of Mary were called by Mary, who appeared to them, to form a community that was devoted to her. They were happy to give up their comfortable lives and families to live in simplicity and prayer. They must have been joyful men. They attracted so many people that in order to maintain their lifestyle, they had to move to the top of Mt. Senario near Florence, Italy where they lived in caves.

These first Servants of Mary also operated the Hospice of Mary in Florence. One can only imagine what a hospice might have been like in the 13th Century and the suffering that these men witnessed while their patients were waiting for death. One of the images of Mary that Servites revere is that of her at the foot of the cross. It is her ministry of

compassionate presence that Servites and really all Christians are called to emulate.

From the first Servites, the Seven Holy Founders through the almost-800 year history of the order, members of the order are called to be servants like Mary. The charism of the order is compassion, seeking of justice and hospitality and using Mary as our example. To live the Servite lifestyle unites us with the sorrows of Mary and the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

A good example of living as a Servite was our first pastor, Fr. Jim. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer at the time our Associate, Fr. John was also dealing with cancer so being shorthanded, Fr. Jim didn't want to have a treatment that would keep him away from the parish. Although chemo was recommended, he chose to only have radiation so he could physically be present to our community as needed.

The radiation was not as targeted as it is today and as a result, many of his organs were damaged and what ultimately caused his death was organ failure. Few parishioners were aware of what he was going through at the time. Those who knew Fr. Jim knew he was a compassionate presence to people in need despite his own suffering, which he held inside. As Christians, Servite and non-Servite, it is our calling to be a compassionate presence to those who are suffering on their crosses today. These crosses are crosses of sickness, crosses of despair, poverty, loss, injustice to name a few.

On this feast of the presentation, it is a good time to look at ourselves and how we present ourselves to God. The lives of the Seven Holy Founders and their spiritual are a fine example for all of us to emulate. As Christians we don't have a rite of presentation like the Jews, but we are called to give of ourselves so that we can present ourselves to God as people who are in union with the sacrifices of Jesus and Mary.

The Servants of Mary still exist at Our Lady of Grace and Betty Schwind, the prioress of Mary, Queen of the Servants Servite Secular Order community will come forward on behalf of our community.

## 11. THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

The readings this weekend remind us that we are called to preach the Gospel by living in the light and being the light of Christ to all we encounter.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah comes when the Kingdom of Israel has been conquered by the Assyrians about 730 years before the birth of Christ. The tribes that lost their independence were Zebulon and Naphtali who held territory in the Galilee.

The tribe members faced deportation as slave labor and were humiliated at becoming subject to a foreign power. Their outlook on life was dark and gloomy. The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the darkness of the time will be replaced with the light of freedom. He said, "The people who walked in darkness will see a great light; upon those who dwelt in a land of gloom a light has shone."

Isaiah expects to see God end the long, dark night of conquest by sending a mighty king who will liberate the Israelites. As we know, God did send to Israel and the world a mighty king but not in the form of a great military leader. In Isaiah chapter 9 verse 6, the prophet announces that, "For us a child is born, to us a son is given, and government will be upon his shoulder." While Isaiah was looking to the more immediate liberation of Israel from the Assyrians, we believe that a child was born to us to liberate us from evil and from death of the soul.

At the time of the second reading, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the community at Corinth was living in the darkness of lack of unity.

The loyalty of the Corinthians was divided among a number of leaders. St. Paul was not adverse to diversity, but reminded the people that they all had their relationship with Jesus Christ in common and that unity in Jesus was far greater than anything that divided people in their diversity. The light of Christ overcomes the dark shadows of what divides us.

In the Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophesy made by Isaiah in the first reading. In the Gospel two weeks ago, Jesus was baptized by John, not only setting the example for our own

baptisms, but marking Jesus' call to begin his public ministry. Jesus left his home town of Nazareth and went to Capernaum, by the Sea of Galilee. There he began his public ministry, preaching and curing illness.

His light begins to dawn as he proclaims, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." As his light grows stronger, Jesus calls his first disciples to him in his proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus chooses his first disciples, he does not call on the rabbis or other educated people of the time. Nor does he choose from among the poorest people who have no prospects to begin with. He chooses fishermen, part of what one might consider the middle class of the time. Fish were a staple of the First Century diet and fishermen did fairly well economically. He chose disciples who had to give something up to follow him, at a time when most people were hurting financially. These first disciples had enough belief in him that they were willing to walk away from a comfortable living to do something better, to follow Jesus.

Jesus uses the image of fish from very early on in his earthly ministry. He encounters James and John and says to these two fishermen, "Come after me and I will make you fishers of men." In the First Century, there were two kinds of nets in common use, the casting net and the drag net. Fishing with the casting net took a great deal of skill. The weighted net was placed in the water and when a catch that the fisherman specifically wanted was directly over the net, he would quickly pull it closed over the catch. The drag net was a large square net with a weighted bottom that stood vertically in the water. When the net was pulled in, it formed the shape of a giant cone and caught everything in its path without discrimination. After the net was drawn in, the catch was separated into good fish and useless fish.

These two types of nets represent two visions of church, an exclusive one and an inclusive one. The exclusive view is that people who are really and fully committed are different from the rest of the world and they should make up the church. Obviously, this view does not leave space for people to grow in their faith and commitment after hearing Jesus' call.

The inclusive view that the drag net represents is that the Church, a major instrument in building the Kingdom of God on earth, does not discriminate and welcomes everyone that comes, wherever they happen to be in their faith journey. We know from Scripture that Jesus kept company



with all kinds of people, regardless of social status or whether they were sinners. Jesus, by his own example, wanted an inclusive church. The inclusive church is a major challenge for some.

In May of 2013, Pope Francis speaking in Rome said, "May the church be the place of God's mercy and love where everyone can feel themselves welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And in order to make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the church must have open doors so that all might enter. And we must go out of those doors and proclaim the Gospel." A good example of the Pope's statement is in the jail and prison ministry where some of parishioners minister. They never ask an inmate what they did to cause them to be incarcerated. Instead, they see them as people who made a mistake and welcome them and minister to them where they are.

While the exclusive vision of church leaves space for judgment, the inclusive vision calls us to welcome all and hope that they will hear Jesus' calling in their lives. Matthew Chapter 7 Verse 1 challenges each of us to not judge that we may not be judged.

It is up to each of us to be that light of Christ to others in the world. That is the only way we can rid the world of darkness. We may not succeed with everyone, but we can welcome everyone and hope that they hear the call. We need to listen for our own call. Each one of us has a calling.

Sometimes it is a call to minister in church, it may be a call to minister at work, in the community or in the family or in more than one place.

So many people in our community who have followed God's call to service. Of course we need many more. We come to Mass each week to worship God as a community. We truly bring the light of Christ in the context of our lives outside of Mass. You probably have noticed that the dismissal from Mass has been changed from "Go forth, the Mass has ended" to "Go in peace glorifying the Lord by our lives." We are all called to leave this space today, and each time we attend Mass, to be the light of Christ to the people we touch in our lives.

## 12. **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

For the past two weeks, and again this week, Matthew's Gospels have been a warning to the Scribes and Pharisees of the First Century and to us today. Two weeks ago Matthew's warning was about arrogance and the call to be servant. Last week we were warned to be ready when we encounter God and today we are warned that we are called to service and spiritual growth. Jesus also called us to another kind of service when he said "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." It is important to serve our country.

Will my fellow veterans please stand so we can show our appreciation. Most of us are too young to remember but November 11 was once the date of the celebration of Armistice Day. World War I was called "The War to End All Wars." This was not the case because of the losses, but people actually thought that it would ensure enduring peace. Unfortunately, peace has not endured. As we pray for our veterans let us continue to pray for peace as we did when sang the Gloria --- "peace to God's people, peace to all of the earth."

Going back to the Gospel --- the master, before going away, entrusts three of his servants with talents. Talents are not coins, but 71 pounds of coins and the actual value depended on whether the coins were copper, silver or gold.

Silver was the most popular First Century coinage and a silver talent was worth about 12 man years of labor. It was a great deal of money to entrust to an individual.

In the parable, the talents represent gifts from God, or what we know as talent. God gives each of the three servants a differing number of talents, just as we are each given different gifts.

The First Century listener would immediately equate the servant who was given one talent only to bury it with the Scribes and Pharisees and their attitude towards the Law. The aim of these groups was to build a fence around the Law and to keep it the same forever without regard to change and development of religion and its relevance to current times.

Jesus brought a new way of thinking and was trying to emphasize that religion is not meant to be paralyzed by people with closed minds,

people who were more interested in the letter of the Law than in love, the spirit of the Law.

The parable reaches out over 20 plus centuries to speak to us. As the Scribes and Pharisees built a wall around the Law, many also build a wall around the aspects of religion they hold dear. We have experienced this as Catholics. When the Mass moved from Latin to the language of the people, many Catholics had a hard time giving up a tradition that they held dear and some still do. We will be experiencing another change in the wording of the Mass in two weeks, which will require some letting go of the familiar.

The parable calls us to much more than an open mind and willingness to change. The master gives each of the three servants a different number of talents to invest according to what he believes their abilities are. The servant who got one talent was afraid to risk; the other two were not and were able to multiply the master's investments. God gives each of us different gifts or talents. God knows that we each have different abilities and is not concerned with what we are incapable of doing, but is concerned about the effort that we put into what we do. Whatever talents we have, small or large, are meant to be placed in the service of God.

The parable also tells us that we are not to become complacent but we are called to grow in what we can give.

Doing a good job at something doesn't mean that we can sit back for the rest of our lives and do what we know and no more, but we need to learn to give more and more to God. Don't we raise our children that way; giving them greater responsibilities as they grow in maturity and show they can handle more? It is exactly the same in using our gifts for God and the people of God. The man who is given one talent is not punished for failing; he is punished for not overcoming his fear and trying.

Finally, the parable tells us that those who have more will be given more and those who have not will have everything taken away. These words should not be taken for some divine redistribution of wealth but as we develop our God given talents, we will be able to achieve more. But, if we don't use it, we will lose it.

Take an athlete such as a weight lifter who exercises more and more in order to lift great weights. If the weight lifter stops working out for a

period of time, the amount of weight that they can lift decreases. The same can be said for a musician, an artist, or a person in any occupation that requires practice to build skill. So it is with us as we serve God and the people of God. The more we do, the more we learn how much more we can do.

The first and second readings tie in really well with the Gospel this week. In the first reading from Proverbs, the wife, who represents wisdom, exhibits the talents and gifts that allow her to serve God. She is loving, caring and good. She uses her gifts to do her work well; she reaches out to the poor and needy, and loves and respects God. In other words, she puts her gifts to the service of God. These are all attributes that we are called to emulate.

The second reading, the letter from Paul to the Thessalonians sounds very much like the Gospel message of readiness that we heard last week. Paul is telling the Christian Community of Thessalonica that if they lead a Christian life, a life of service, they will have nothing to fear when they have to account to God for their lives.

There is a story of a small, poor parish in a village in Kenya. They met in the open air beneath a thatched roof. When it came time for the offertory, a round flat basket was passed up and down the rows of benches as people put in coins and small bills. The basket came to a young widow with two small children. She looked at the basket for a long time.

Then she took the basket and placed it on the dirt floor in front of her. Taking off her sandals, she picked up her children, held one on each hip, and stepped into the offering basket; standing with head bowed praying for several minutes. Then she stepped out of the basket and passed it on.

The basket has come to us. What will we put in it? Will we be afraid, like the useless servant, to put anything in? Will we put in nothing or a small token of what we have to give God, or, will we step fearlessly and boldly into the center of the basket giving to God the things God really wants, ourselves and our complete and total trust and love?

We pray that God will call each of us a good and faithful servant.

**DEACON JACK RHINE'S HOMILIES – SECTION 2**

- 1. Jesus was a Realist**
- 2. Trinity Sunday**
- 3. The Church is not a Social Club**
- 4. What would Jesus do?**
- 5. Disciples at Caesarea Philippi**
- 6. Disciples at Caesarea Philippi – Part 2**
- 7. Pharisee question and Jesus' answer**
- 8. Jesus is Watching you (story)**
- 9. Feast of St. John the Evangelist**
- 10. Paul's Message to the people of Galicia**
- 11. Disciples' Power to Heal**
- 12. Solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul**

## 1. JESUS WAS A REALIST

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In the verses of John's Gospel, prior to what we heard this morning, Jesus begins to answer the disciple's questions without the disciples asking them. In other words, he could read their hearts like an open book. That is why they believed in him.

But **Jesus was a realist**. He told the disciples that, in spite of their belief, the time was coming when they would desert him. This is perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Jesus. He knew the weakness of his disciples as he knows our weakness; he knew their failures as he knew our failures; he knew that they would let him down in the moment of his greatest need as we might do. Yet he still loved them as he loves us.

What is even more wonderful--he still trusted them as he trusts us. Jesus knows us at our worst and still loves and trusts us. It is possible that we might forgive someone for hurting or betraying us, but it is likely that we will never trust that person again. But, Jesus knew his friends would abandon him, and instead of chastising them said: "I know that in your weakness you will desert me; nevertheless I know that you will still be conquerors."

Jesus teaches us a great lesson, that we can forgive and trust someone who has seriously failed or betrayed us. Jesus never held the desertion against his disciples after the fact. Jesus calls us to love people as they are. He teaches that if we put someone on a pedestal and think them faultless, we are doomed to disappointment.

Jesus also never thought about how another person's sin would hurt him, but of how it would hurt the person. When someone hurts us, it would make a big difference if we thought, not about the hurt, but of how unhappy they must be to hurt another person.

An unnamed woman in the Ravensbruck concentration camp knew what Jesus taught about forgiveness. She wrote a prayer and pinned it on the shirt of a dead little girl who may have been her daughter. The prayer went like this, "Oh Lord, remember not only the men and women of good will, but also those of ill will. But, do not remember all of the suffering that they inflicted on us. Remember, rather the fruits that we have received, thanks to the suffering; our comradeship, our loyalty, our courage, our generosity; and the greatness of heart that has grown out of all of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness."

Betsie Ten Boom, sister of the well-known evangelist Corrie Ten Boom who died in the same concentration camp, steadfastly refused to hate the guards who beat her eventually to death. Her dying words are both simple and profound. She said,

**“We must tell people what we learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.”**

**As we come to the table of the Lord this morning, may we come as people of forgiveness, as people who live in the image of Jesus Christ.**

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## 2. **TRINITY SUNDAY**

Today, the church celebrates Trinity Sunday. We have been given a priceless gift, a God who loves us no matter what, Jesus, God's only son who is one in being with the father, who died for us, our example of how God calls us to live. Then there is the Holy Spirit, who lives within us and gives us the wisdom and grace to follow Jesus. Our gift of the Trinity is so valuable that we need to acknowledge the Trinity and celebrate it every day of our lives.

The readings this morning have a common thread running through them, the thread of the love that God has for us. In the first reading, God describes himself as

being merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity. In the second reading St. Paul describes God as being the God of love and peace. In the Gospel, St. John describes God as loving the entire world so much that he gave us his only son so that we may have eternal life.

The beauty of God's love is that it is both universal and unconditional. God didn't send Jesus for just the Jews, just the people in the Holy Land, or just the people in the first century. He sent Jesus for all of us, saints and sinners alike. We are taught that we are created in the image of God. We all look different, so being created in the image of God has nothing to do with our appearances. We are created in the image of

God because we have been given God's capacity to love.

In the second reading, the citizens of Corinth are being encouraged by St. Paul to change their ways and support each other and live in peace and love with each other. God's love truly is the good news, but the sad news is that things have not changed much since the first century. All one needs to do is read the newspaper, turn on the television or the radio to see how much things have not changed.

We are made in the image of God and we can do much better as God's sons and daughters, or we can't possibly build God's Kingdom as we are called. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of us and may we pass the gift of the Trinity on to all we meet.

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### **3. Church is not a SOCIAL CLUB**

(missing). . . the youth of his parish. About 2:00 am he decided he needed a walk, some fresh air and a cup of coffee to clear his mind to finish his planning. He walked the several blocks to the local 24-hour diner. While Tony was enjoying his coffee, three loud mouthed, shabbily dressed men, men who people might call bums came in, sat at the counter and ordered coffee. One of the three, Rob, loudly announced in a drunken voice that the next day was his birthday. The other two loudly responded, "Who cares."

After the three left, Tony asked the waiter if these guys came in every night. The waiter responded that they had night watchman jobs at a local factory and that it was their regular habit to come in a little after two for coffee. Tony asked the waiter if it was OK to bring in a birthday cake and have a party for Rob. The waiter had no objections so Tony went out the next day and got a beautifully decorated cake and got the youth group to decorate the diner. He also got some friends to be there at 2 am for the party.

When Rob and his friends came in, they were greeted with the singing of happy birthday. When Rob saw the cake, he was shocked. He told Tony that he had never in his life had a birthday cake. Through tears, he asked Tony if he could take the cake home and look at it for a while before he ate it. When everyone left and the diner was cleaned up, Tony sat and had a cup of coffee with the waiter. The waiter turned to Tony and said, "I'll bet you are from some kind of church." Tony said, "Yes, I am from the church that throws birthday parties for bums at 2 in the morning." The waiter then said, "If I could find a church like that, I would go join as soon as I get off of work."

**My sisters and brothers, who are the people that we consider bums or don't want to include in our lives? Who do we marginalize? Are they of a different race or culture?**

**Is their first language different from ours? Do we think them to be of a different social class? Or, do we just judge them without really knowing them to be "not our kind of people?"**

**Our faith teaches us that Jesus is alive in all of us. Can we reach outside our own small family and parish communities to share Jesus' love with others who are not members of our comfortable familiar group? I pray, and ask you to pray for me, that I can be the kind of deacon that throws birthday parties for bums at 2 in the morning.**

**I am proud to be a member of Our Lady of Grace. We are a community that throws birthday parties for bums. The St. Vincent de Paul Society, through your generous support, helps many people each year. Deacon Bill and I work with**

**Apostleship of the Sea to help seafarers who are away from home for long periods of time. These men and women are lonely, powerless to take care of problems that occur at home, are sometimes treated unjustly by their employers and may be forced to live in unsafe and unsanitary conditions.**

**One of our parishioners founded the Spanish speaking Yellow Umbrella to help educate against and deal with the results of child abuse. There are many other examples of outreach by individuals and groups at Our Lady of Grace.**

**When we come to the table of the Lord today, may we keep in mind that we are all one family, sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. I pray that the Eucharist we will share gives us the strength, grace, and courage to throw birthday parties at 2 in the morning for those people we see as bums.**

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#### **4. WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?**

How many of you have What Would Jesus Do bracelets or necklaces or other things with **WWJD**? Why do we ask that question?

In the reading we just heard, Jesus is going around and making people feel better by curing them. None of us are doctors, so we can't make sick people better. But there are other things that make people feel bad? Can you tell us what some of these things might be? How do you think we can do what Jesus did and heal people?

I would like to tell you a story about a girl and how one person made her feel better when she was sad and lonely. Michelle was in the seventh grade. She lived in California with her family. She had lots of friends, did well in school, and played in several sports. She was very tall for age and especially loved basketball. She was in the junior high youth group in her parish. She loved her life, everything was perfect.

One day, her father came home from work and told the family that he was getting a promotion and being transferred to New York. Michelle was upset by the news, her whole world was falling apart. She didn't know how she would ever live without her friends, her school, without the house she grew up in, and her church.

She had wonderful, tearful good bye parties, all of her friends promised that they would write or e-mail. Then the day came that the family went to the airport, got on a plane and flew to New York.

Her parents registered her in her new school and the next day Michelle got on the school bus and there were lots of kids talking to each other. She sat down in an empty seat and no one even seemed to notice that she was there. They were all involved with their friends.

The first week of school was awful. No one paid any attention to Michelle. They were just too busy with their own lives. Michelle sat in the cafeteria eating lunch alone. After the first week of school, Michelle felt so bad that she wanted to run away and go back to California where her friends were. All she could do was cry.

The next week Sue, who was the captain of the girls basketball team noticed this tall sad looking girl sitting by herself in the cafeteria. Sue went and sat down next to Michelle at first because of her height and hopes that she would like to play basketball because the team wasn't doing very well. Sue and Michelle talked for a while and found that they had a lot in common and really liked each other.

**Sue started introducing Michelle to the other kids and Michelle became friends with many of them. After a few weeks she had a happy life again because one person, Sue, reached out to her and took the trouble to show she cared about her.**

**This is what Jesus wants all of us to do. To heal people who are sad, lonely, or feeling bad just by showing them that we care about them. When we see people in our every day lives, people we know and people we don't know, even people we don't really like, we need to ask the question "What would Jesus do for them?" Then we need to do what Jesus would do, just like Sue did.**

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## **5. Disciples at Caesarea Philippi**

Today's Gospel seems contradictory at first glance. Jesus has just appointed Peter to head the church. Then, when Peter shows his love and concern for Jesus going to meet his death in Jerusalem, Jesus exclaims to Peter, "Get behind me Satan."

Jesus has taken the disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a remote and mostly non-Jewish area north east of the Sea of Galilee. It was a place where Jesus would be able to teach the disciples in peace. It was here that the disciples realized that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah and became believers in him. Jesus was also trying to teach the twelve something more challenging, how to be his followers.

When Jesus reprimanded Peter, he was telling him two things. First, when he called Peter Satan, he was telling him not to follow the world's ways, in this case avoiding necessary suffering. Jesus knew that he needed to walk the path that was defined by his Father. Walking any other path would be walking the path of Satan.

Second, the phrase "get behind me" meant be my follower. Let me lead Peter, you get behind me and follow me. Put aside the world's ways and follow me. We too, are often like Peter. We are believers in Christ, but we are not always followers. Being a follower demands considerably more than being a believer. It means willingly following Jesus through his suffering for the sake of building his kingdom in our everyday lives. It means giving of ourselves and sometimes suffering or sacrificing to serve God by serving others.

There is a story about a man, who could be a member of any parish, even this one. He led a good life, he attended church, he spent most of his spare time enjoying the great outdoors fishing and hunting. He died suddenly one day and went to heaven. St. Peter said, "follow me, I will take you to your new home." As they walked through the city of heaven, they passed a large development of luxury condominiums. The man asked St. Peter, "These are fantastic, is this where I am going to live?" St. Peter said, "No, not here." As they continued to walk, they turned into a long road lined with huge mansions. The man excitedly asked, "Will I live here?" St. Peter said no. They next walked through a large development of ranch houses. The man thought, these aren't luxurious but they aren't too bad. St. Peter read his mind and said "Not here." Finally, on the outskirts of a city, there was a crudely built shack. St. Peter said, "This is your home." The man said, "but I had better on earth!" St. Peter replied. "You didn't send us much in the way of building materials."

**My sisters and brothers, it is when we follow Christ by doing the things that He would do, that we ensure our place in the heavenly kingdom. Our belief is only strong when we put it into action to the best of our ability.**

**Today the church celebrates the feast of St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominican Order, founded to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. He was selfless as a follower of Christ. He sold his precious books to feed the poor. He once offered to sell himself as a slave in order to buy the freedom of others who were enslaved. Dominic is a fine example of a true believer and a true follower.**

**Today we also celebrate the life of Linda Jensen, another true follower of Christ. We commemorate the first-year anniversary of her ascension to the heavenly Kingdom of God. Anyone who had the privilege of knowing Linda knew that she was a follower of Christ. Her career was more than a way to make a living; it was one of ministering to others. Linda spent every school day with a hearing-impaired student signing everything that was said in each class. The last young man she worked with for three years in high school was accepted at Florida Tech with a full scholarship. Linda's love and dedication had to have played a part in his success. She also taught American Sign Language to others, enabling them to serve their fellow humans.**

**Linda had a deep belief in giving life to others and turned that belief into action. The husband of a cousin needed a kidney to live a normal life. Linda gave one of hers. Even after her death, at her own request, many others live due to the donation of her organs and tissues.**

**Linda had many other God given gifts as an artist and a musician. She developed and shared them freely. She played flute in the Space Coast Flute Choir for over 20 years and praised God with her music in church choirs, including here at Our Lady of Lourdes. She loved the gifts of God in nature and went camping and canoeing as much as possible.**

**In short, Linda loved life and lived it fully in the service of the People of God. She was an inspiration to her family and friends and an example to her children and others of a selfless follower of Christ. We know that Linda lives in one of the mansions in heaven.**

**Her life here provided enough building materials for a very fine building in heaven.**

**My brothers and sisters, as we come to the table of the Lord this morning, let us pray that we will be nourished to have the strength and courage to follow the examples of St. Dominic and Linda Jensen; real followers of Jesus Christ.**

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## 6. Disciples at Caesarea Philippi (different homily)

In today's Gospel, Jesus takes his disciples to Caesarea Philippi, an area with few Jews about twenty-five miles from the Sea of Galilee. He knows that he will be leaving the earth soon, and wants to be able to teach his disciples in peace, how to carry on his earthly work.

He starts by trying to find out if they believe in him. He does this by first asking who people say he is. The disciples thought that Jesus might be John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets, very powerful Jewish figures.

Then Jesus turns to Peter and says "who do you say I am?" Peter says, "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter has identified himself as a believer. Jesus has a more daunting task, to turn the disciples into followers; to mold them into people that will continue his work.

There is some controversy among scripture scholars regarding who Jesus said was the rock upon who he was going to build his church. Some believe it was Peter, others believe it was Jesus or God the Father. The most fitting interpretation is that God is the foundation, Jesus is the cornerstone and Peter is the next stone laying the beginnings for a structure built through the ages where each of us is a piece of that structure.

We are all meant to be followers of Christ, which is far more demanding than being a believer. It takes faith to believe, but it takes action to follow. The early disciples had a difficult time with being followers. They fell asleep on the job in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter denied Jesus when he was arrested. The disciples deserted him and Judas betrayed him.

We have the same difficulty being followers today. Just a few examples might be when someone makes a racial slur or makes fun of someone's disability and we stand by and do nothing. Or, when we are too busy to stop and help or just be there for someone who needs us. Or, when we spend money on unneeded luxuries and do nothing to help others meet their basic needs. The list goes on.

Being a true follower of Christ is not easy. It requires that we make ourselves vulnerable by risking to reach out in love to another. It means sacrificing a want to satisfy another's basic need. It means putting aside our prejudices to minister to people who are different from us or not to our liking. There was a real powerful statement in this week's issue of the Florida Catholic that said "the true litmus test of being a Christian is how we love our enemies." We don't live in a world where we consider loving our enemies; our society is more likely to want to obliterate our enemies.

Being a follower means engaging other people in the spirit of unconditional love just because they need our love. Being a follower of Christ means being countercultural and doing the right thing and standing against injustice, regardless of the opinions of those around us.

There is a story about youth group members from a Parish in Texas crossing the border into Mexico. They spent the day working hard to help the poorest of the poor to repair their houses. At the end of the day, they were very tired and very hungry. When they crossed the border back into Texas, their bus stopped at a roadside diner. A few of the youth were black. They went into the diner and sat down and waited and waited for service. After a very long wait, one of the youth went over to a waitress and asked when they might be served. The waitress said that she would serve them, but the blacks would have to eat on the bus.

The youth looked at each other and finally one of them said, “lets go, we aren’t that hungry.”

Are their times in our lives that we have not been true followers of Christ and could have behaved differently? What would Jesus do has become a trite and overused saying. But, we have to ask ourselves that question every time we are tempted to walk away from a difficult situation or ignore others with problems.

St. Theresa very aptly defined our job description as followers in her prayer:

*Christ has:*

*No body on earth but ours,*

*No hands but ours,*

*No feet but ours,*

*Ours are the eyes through which he is to look out*

*Christ’s compassion on the world*

*Ours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good*

*Ours are the hands which he is to bless now.*

*In other words, to follow Christ, we need to be Christ to Others.*

Christ asked Peter who Peter thought he was. When we meet Christ again, he will ask us who we are. Let us pray that the Eucharist will give us the strength and grace to live that we may say, “Lord Jesus, I am a true follower.”

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## **7. Pharisee question & Jesus' answer**

In the Gospel, a Pharisee is trying to trick Jesus into embarrassing himself by asking him which commandment is the greatest. Jesus is well trained in Hebrew Scripture though, and quotes from Deuteronomy: "You shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

This text is part of what Jews might consider their creed. It is recited at every Jewish service and is one of the first verses to be memorized by every Jewish child. Jesus goes on to quote from Leviticus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus reduces the Ten Commandments to just two, and does it in such a way that we are required to actively live the commandments.

The Ten Commandments are good commandments that we should follow, but for the most part, they state what we should not do. One could conceivably strictly observe the Ten Commandments but never show any love.

The two great commandments that Jesus gives us call for us to take the action to love, to love God and to love our neighbor. We need to ask ourselves the questions; "What does it mean to love God and love our neighbor?" and "Who is our neighbor?"

Loving God means trying to live out every minute of our lives, in our actions and in our thoughts, and in our feelings in obedience to God. The word neighbor probably had a different meaning in biblical times than it does today. Most of the population of the holy land in the first century and before lived in small villages and never had the reason or the money to leave their village. So a person's neighborhood was their whole world.

We live in a much different world today. With the media and economic interdependence, the whole world is our neighborhood. In John's Gospel, Jesus commanded us to love one another. He didn't say love the people in your family, or love the people in your town, or love the people of your race, culture or religion. He said love everyone.

The next question for our consideration is "What does Jesus mean by love." The kind of love that we usually identify with is the sentimental, highly emotional love that we have for each other in our relationships and families. This kind of love is beautiful and a gift from God. But "feel good love" is not all that Jesus is referring to. It is easy to love the loveable, but Christ calls us to a much more difficult type of love.

First, the love that we are called to is unconditional. He is calling us to continue to love when those we love disappoint us. But more than that, we are called to love people we don't know, people who are not like us, people that we don't even like, people who live half way around the world from us, people who are difficult to love. We are called to love all people just because like us, they were made in God's image.

The Hebrew Scripture reading from Exodus doesn't explicitly use the word love. But it exemplifies the kind of love Jesus commands us to give when it calls us to treat with dignity, with respect, and with hospitality the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor just because they are the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the poor. Just because they too were created in God's image.

The strangers, people of different race, culture or language are still with us today. The widows and orphans and others who are vulnerable are still with us today. The poor are still with us today. Do we recognize their presence and love them?

Not too long ago, there was an article in the Florida Catholic that said: "The litmus test of a Christian is how they love their enemies." How ever we define our enemies, do we try to love them by thinking of them as creations of God? The love for neighbor that Christ calls us to is not easy. How do we respond?

An example from fairly recent history, of a world leader that loved as we are all called to love is Dag Hammarskjold. He was secretary general of the United Nations who was killed in a plane crash in 1961 while trying to bring peace to the Congo. He was a devout man who dedicated his life to serve God and the welfare of humankind. He said that his goal was to love life and people as God loves them, for the sake of their infinite possibilities. Those who knew him said that he lived his life in pursuit of that goal.

He spent his life spreading good will among nations. He worked hard to keep peace. He convinced nations with surplus food and goods to share them with nations in need. He often worked with world leaders who were stubborn and prideful. He prayed to God to help him have the inner peace in his heart to deal with these difficult leaders in peace and love. He was able to accomplish a great deal to benefit the people of the world who were suffering.

Dag Hammerskjold never married nor had a family of his own. But, his life was not meaningless and dull. He lived a beautiful life loving God and loving others to make our world a better place to live. His saying yes to the two great commandments, without reservation, allowed him to make the world a better place to live.

It is living a life of love that gives our life true meaning. It is living a life of love that helps us to build the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. It would be easy for us to say that Dag Hammerskjold was far above anything that we could

**expect to be. Maybe he was, but we have the same power to have a positive effect on other lives by loving God and loving others.**

**There is a story about a little girl named Helen who lived in an orphanage. Helen was a homely little girl and was not liked by the staff because of her appearance. They kept hoping that some family member would show up and claim her but, so far, that had not happened. Oneday, a staff member observed Helen putting a note in a tree and ran back to tell the supervisor. The staff was overjoyed that maybe she was communicating with someone who would claim her. Excitedly, they ran out to the tree and found a note that said "Whoever finds this, Ilove you."**

**My sisters and brothers, if an unhappy little girl in an orphanage can love without knowing the object of her love, we can do the same. May the Eucharist we receive this morning increase our capacity to love unconditionally, to love those we consider unlovable, and to love those we don't even know.**

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### **8. JESUS IS WATCHING YOU (story)**

There is a story that some of you may have heard about a burglar who breaks into a house. As he is walking around the living room looking for articles to steal, he suddenly hears a voice say, "Jesus is watching you!"

The burglar is surprised and starts shining a flashlight around and finally locates a parrot. He asks the parrot, "Who are you?" The parrot replies, "Clarence!" and the burglar starts laughing and proclaims, "Who gave you that stupid name?" The bird replies, "the same person who named the Rottweiler behind you, Jesus!"

This morning's first reading and Gospel pertain to people who have spoken with authority. You better believe that the burglar knew the parrot was speaking with authority when he turned around and saw the Rottweiler glaring at him.

In the first reading, the Israelites are nearing the end of their journey to the Promised Land. The king of Moab hires a false prophet, Balaam, to go to the Israelites and put a curse on them. Balaam mounts his donkey to ride off and deliver his curse and a strange thing happens. The donkey must have been an ancestor of Mr. Ed. because he tells Balaam not to curse the people of God. Instead, Balaam, a pagan, blesses the Israelites. He is not able to speak on his own authority or the authority of the king of Moab. He can only speak with God's authority.

In the Gospel the chief priests and elders are questioning Jesus' authority. Any answer that Jesus gives will be the wrong one because he has to either say he is speaking without authority or with God's authority. If he says that, he will be accused of usurping God's authority. Jesus uses a traditional rabbinical tactic of answering a question with a question and asks them whether John's baptism was of human or divine origin.

Either way they answered, they had a problem so they declined to answer Jesus' question. Jesus never had to defend his own authority.

Both of these readings say a lot about who does speak with authority. In the case of the Gospel, Jesus, the guy outside of the power structure, was the one who obviously spoke with authority.

In the first reading from Numbers, The pagan and false prophet, someone we would consider to be sleazy, spoke with authority and so did the donkey.

This scripture teaches us an important lesson. We need to carefully discern what people are telling us. The fact that someone is in government or of high renown

does not mean that they are speaking with God's authority or even with moral authority. They may be or may not be. On the other hand, someone we write off, an outcast, someone we view as a lowlife or even consider a jackass may be delivering God's truth. It is important that we be both open and critical listeners.

Furthermore, we may be called to be the person who speaks with God's authority. This is sometimes difficult and takes courage. An example is if we are in a situation where a friend, possibly in the company of others, makes an offensive statement like a racial or ethnic slur or viciously condemns another human being with no grounds for doing so. Or, if someone is spreading malicious gossip or anything not grounded in truth about a fellow human being.

May the Eucharist we receive this morning nourish us to be able to discern who speaks for God. May it give us the courage to speak with God's authority when we know that it is the right thing to do.

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## **9. Feast of ST. JOHN the EVANGELIST**

Today, the Church celebrates the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, also known as St. John the Divine, the Beloved Disciple and by a number of other names. St. John was a man of love and a man of faith. He was the first to accept that Christ had risen and after Jesus' crucifixion, and he took care of Mary.

After Pentecost, John had a prominent role in the founding of the early Christian communities. St. John was credited with authorship of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelations. The only disciple not to die a martyr's death, John lived close to 100 years.

There is a story that St. John may have heard, from the great treasure of Jewish oral tradition. It once happened that a woman in Sidon lived with her husband for ten years without giving birth to a child. Following the law that in those days governed such matters, they went to Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai to arrange for a divorce. The rabbi said to them: "By your life! Just as you had a festive banquet when you got married, so you should not separate now without first having a festive banquet."

They followed the rabbi's advice and prepared a great banquet. During the banquet, the woman gave her husband more to drink than usual. When he was in high spirits, he said to his wife, "Little daughter, you may take out of my house whatever you love most and then return to the house of your father."

This is what she did. After her husband had fallen asleep, she ordered her man servants and her maid servants to take her husband and the bed he was sleeping on to her father's house. About midnight, the man awoke. When he sobered up he look around in astonishment and said, "Little daughter, where I am?" His wife replied, "You are in my father's house." He said, "By what business am I in your father's house?" She replied, "Don't you remember telling me last night that I may take whatever I loved best with me when I returned to my father's house? I love nothing in the whole world more than I love you."

The couple again went to Rabbi ben Yohai. The Rabbi prayed with them and the woman quickly became pregnant.

Our first reaction when a person thinks with their heart rather than with their head is that a rash decision was made. No one judges that as a compliment. Yet today we, the church celebrate the gift of a man who always thought with his heart.

If John heard the story about the Jewish couple, he would have probably had a great deal of understanding for the husband and the wife. In biblical days, a

husband could divorce his wife just by saying that he was going to do so. Yet, he put on a banquet and told his wife to take with her what she loved most rather than just putting her out with nothing. The wife could have taken advantage of her husband's generosity by taking things that would have made her financially independent, yet she took her husband himself, even though he had initiated a divorce. The couple thought with their hearts, not their heads.

The writings of John celebrate love, the love of the Father sending his son into the world to save all of us. The first and best Christmas gift of all. The writings celebrate our likeness to God in our ability to love for the sake of love.

The first reading speaks clearly of love, the love that we have heard and seen and touched.

Today's Gospel takes us from Christmas Week to Easter morning. Two men enter the tomb where Jesus' body was laid and find it empty. Neither Peter nor John knew quite what to make of the discarded burial clothing they find there. Who would know? Would we?

Thinking with our heads would probably offer many explanations, but John, thinking with his heart, took a leap of faith. He saw the empty tomb and he believed.

Faith is not something that we can come to as a result of logical thought. Faith is the process of our heart moving us to a truth that may not be logical.

In the first reading the Evangelist is telling us about the person, Jesus, who claimed his heart allowing the rest of us to believe. John tells us that his joy will be complete. Like the Lord to whom he gave his heart, he finds his happiness in assuring our happiness. In his love, John captures the spirit of Christmas.

Each year, Christ's love is reborn into our hearts, prompting us to find our happiness by assuring the happiness of others. If all people thought with their hearts, hearts of love, what a wonderful world of peace and joy we would live in today. Our example should be John who never did learn to think with his head --- Thank God!

My sisters and brothers, I have experienced the love of each of you in my life and that love is so precious to me. It has given me hope and strength to get through what I am facing. I pray that you know the love I have for each of you and that God will bless you abundantly in 2003 and in every year of your lives.

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### **10. PAUL'S MESSAGE to the people of GALICIA**

Today's first reading is confusing at first glance. It is difficult to understand what Paul is trying to get across to the Christian community of Galicia. We know that before his conversion, Paul was a tax collector. It seems that he was also a trained rabbi.

Jewish scholars find four different levels of meaning when interpreting scripture. The first level is the literal meaning, one that fundamentalists usually stop at. The second level is the suggested meaning, derived from looking at what might lie below the written word. The third level is investigated meaning, derived from research into the cultural and religious milieu at the time the scripture was written. Finally, the fourth and highest level is the allegorical level, where the scripture scholar created a whole new meaning from the original story.

Being able to interpret scripture at the allegorical level is the summit of the career of a Jewish scripture scholar and Paul had reached that summit.

Paul uses the story of Hagar and Sarah to create an allegory to illustrate the difference between the old Law of the Scribes and Pharisees and the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Sarah, a free person, who gave birth at an extremely old age by the grace of God, represents the freedom of the new covenant. Hagar who was a slave who gave birth out of a non-legitimate relationship represents the slavery of the old Law.

Although this allegory may seem confusing to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian mind, it is simply saying that we gain freedom by living the Good News, the Gospels, the spirit of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It also tells us that we become slaves by behavior that causes us to live for any purpose other than to follow Jesus Christ.

One common example in today's society is living in pursuit of money and possessions. There is an old French fable about a cobbler who was a happy and contented man. People who passed his shop laughed and waved when they saw him singing at the top of his voice while fixing shoes. Many people stopped in at his shop just to bask in the warmth of his smile. One of the people who observed the cobbler was a banker who sang little and smiled less. He seldom slept well. At first he was irritated by the constant good humor of the cobbler, but as the days passed, he was attracted to the man.

Finally, he decided to visit the cobbler and discover his secret of happiness. After the two men chatted for a while, the banker inquired, "Are you wealthy? Pardon me for asking, but how much money do you make each year?" "My family is seldom in want," the cobbler answered. "Some days I only fix shoes; no one



buys. The shop is closed on holy days, so there is no income at all when we celebrate the witness of a saint. I simply cannot give you an accurate sum.” “How wonderfully simple,” the banker said, “I have decided to eliminate your financial problems for the immediate future since you have openly shared your story with me. Take this gift of 300 gold coins and use them whenever you have need.”

Overjoyed, the cobbler quickly went home and buried the gold in a corner of his house. This suddenly brought many changes. He often left the shop to go home when the family was absent, thinking that someone might come when they were gone to steal his wealth. He began to lose sleep at night because he feared that people were plotting to steal the gold. Old friends noticed that he did not sing with the same cheer, he also seemed suspicious when old friends stopped in the shop just to chat.

Finally, the cobbler visited the banker with the bag of gold in his hands. “Thank you for your generous gift,” he began, “but I cannot really afford to be the owner of these gold coins. Please take your money back that I may again enjoy music, sleep and my friends. It seems that when I buried the money, I buried happiness at the same time.”

All of us need to constantly ask ourselves what we are enslaved to. Is it acquisitions, like money, possessions, or power or is it attitudes and feelings like negativity, fear or lack of self-worth.

As Christians, we are called to love God above all things. It is that love that frees us. It is love that is always more powerful than what enslaves us. It is only God’s love and our love for God that sets us free.

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## **11. DISCIPLES' POWER TO HEAL**

Prior to this morning's Gospel, Jesus had been away. He had already sent his disciples out to preach, heal and cast out demons. Presumably, when the father brought the boy to the disciples, they had the power to drive out the demons in Jesus' name. Yet, they failed to heal the boy. When they questioned Jesus about their failure, he basically told them that they were not living close enough to God. They had been given the power to heal but were not maintaining it by staying close to God through prayer.

We are taught a very powerful lesson by this incident. God may have given us a gift, but unless we stay in close relationship with God, the gift could wither and die.

God once gave a man a powerful gift as a preacher. When the man's prayer life ceased, his preaching degenerated into words. He became a man of words rather than a man of power to create change.

God once gave a man the gift of being an incredible musician. But when his prayer life ceased, he became a mere professional, using the gift only for his own gain and his music became lifeless and uninspiring.

This does not mean that we cannot use our gifts to make a living. But, we find joy in our gifts when we are also using them for God.

The famous Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind, before every performance, would pray alone in her dressing room with the words, "God, help me to sing true tonight."

No matter how great our gifts may be, unless we acknowledge they came from God and unless we use them for God, the gifts become empty and lifeless. The disciples were a powerful example. Jesus himself gave them the power to heal. We can easily get the sense that they became convinced that they in themselves were important, that their power was theirs only, and that they did not have to maintain a relationship with God through prayer. They were shocked to find that their power had vanished.

Whatever gifts God has given us will vanish whenever we try to use them only for ourselves. We keep them alive when we care in touch with God through prayer and unselfishly use our gifts for God's glory.

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## **12. SOLEMNITY OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL**

Today, as Father Emmanuel said at the beginning of Mass, the Church celebrates the solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul. Both men are so important to the founding of the Church that they each deserve their own day. But, it is fitting that we celebrate these men together as, after Jesus Christ, they are the twin pillars of the Church.

Peter and Paul had a major similarity. Before they entered their own ministries, both men had some glaring defects. First, Peter. Peter was a coward and he deserted Jesus in his time of need. There were also times when he “just didn’t get it.” For example, at the Last Supper Peter told Jesus that he would never wash Jesus’ feet.

Then there is Paul. By his own admission in the second reading, Paul was a sinner who ruthlessly zealously persecuted Christians. Neither of these saints would have been voted most likely to succeed, but yet they did.

Jesus had confidence in both of these men. He could look through their limitations and see potential for great things. Jesus put Peter in charge of his disciples. He founded the Church in Jerusalem and performed many miracles of healing such as the healing of the man crippled from birth in the first reading.

Jesus came to Paul through a vision. Paul founded a number of church communities in the Mediterranean area, performing the miracle of getting diverse people to get along together and live their lives according to the teachings of Christ. Both Peter and Paul are credited with founding the Church in Rome.

Peter and Paul were executed because they chose living for Christian values and proclaiming Christ as God instead of living Roman values and giving allegiance to Roman government.

The Gospel quotes Jesus as saying, “... when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” Jesus was referring to his own horrible death. We gray hairs can probably relate to not being able to do some of the things that we used to do. But, consider that Jesus may also be referring to the results of becoming mature in faith.

As we grow in faith, we are more likely to go where God is calling us. We are more likely to go to places where we really don’t want to go. We go because God calls and we listen.

Peter and Paul are the ultimate examples of what we are called to do. They gave their lives to Christ, and they died for the Church. We may not all be called to be martyrs and die for Church, but we are all called to live for Christ. We are all called to take a role in Christ’s Church. Because of our baptism, we have both the privilege and responsibility to serve the Church.

Attending Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation is what Catholics do. But, it is not all we are called to do. We don't come to this place at the appointed time to get our "hell avoidance" card punched in the square for each date we should be in Church.

Our desire for Eucharist and our need for Eucharist is what should bring us to Mass. The Church teaches that Eucharist is not only found in the body and precious blood of Christ. It is also the Word of God proclaimed from Scripture and the Body of Christ, our sisters and brothers, with whom we gather to worship and celebrate. We come to Mass to be energized, to be strengthened to hear our calling from God and go into the world to live it. Being Eucharist is what enables ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

In Neil's talk before Mass, he spoke of the school children providing service to the community on Make a Difference Day. This is an example of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Peter and Paul dedicated their lives, from the time they entered ministry, to being Eucharist. They gave everything they had until they were executed. Now, they leave us an example.

God has given each of us gifts and calls each of us to use those gifts to benefit the Body of Christ. There is so much that needs to be done, both in the parish and in the community. There is a great deal of outreach that we can't do at Our Lady of Grace because people are not coming forward. For example, St. Vincent de Paul, Ministry to the Sick, and Loaves and Fishes all need more people to do Christ's work. Sponsors and catechists are needed to walk the faith journey with people wanting to become members of the Church. The list goes on and on. Yet, a very small percentage of people attending Mass today are involved in any parish ministry.

Former President John F. Kennedy once said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." It could also be said "Ask not what your church can do for you, but what you can do for your church." The church is not a sacrament and funeral factory. We are church. We are a visible sign of Jesus Christ working in the world today.

We are all challenged to answer Jesus' call at the end of the Gospel, "Follow Me." We are all challenged to follow the example of Peter and Paul. We are all called to pray to God for help in discerning what God has prepared us to do. With the love of God and the nourishment of the Eucharist, we are ordinary people who can achieve the extraordinary. Looking beyond our limitations, Jesus sees our potential to do great things.

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**DEACON JACK RHINE'S HOMILIES** – Section 3

1. The Good Shepherd
2. The Eucharist
3. On Motherhood
4. Advent
5. Parable of the Ten Virgins
6. Baptism
7. Blessed are the Peacemakers
8. Temptation in the Wilderness

## 1. **THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

In biblical days, sheep were normally raised for wool, rather than for meat. The shepherd loved his sheep. Often the sheep were almost like family pets; each one had a name that it would answer to. The sheep knew their shepherd's voice and would only answer to him.

Names are also important to us. Have you ever been in a situation where you met someone you knew and didn't remember their name? That can be embarrassing. Or, have you met someone who you knew who didn't remember your name? Were you disappointed? When someone you have not seen in a while calls you by name, do you get a warm feeling because you were recognized?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd tells us that he knows us all by name. In Hebrew Scripture we are told that God has written down the name of all of his people on the palm of his hand. Being known by name is a sign that we are loved or at least cared about.

Names link us together with other people, even people who we think are different from us. Egerton Young was the first missionary to the Red Indians. In Saskatchewan he went out and told them of the love of God. To the Indians it was like a new revelation. When the missionary had told his message, an old chief said: "When you spoke of the great Spirit just now, did I hear you say, 'Our Father'?" "Yes," said Egerton Young. "That is very new and sweet to me," said the chief. "We never thought of the great Spirit as Father. We heard him in the thunder; we saw him in the lightning, the tempest and the blizzard, and we were afraid. So when you tell us that the great Spirit is our Father, that is very beautiful to us." The old man paused, and then he went on, as a glimpse of glory suddenly shone on him. "Missionary, did you say that the Great Spirit is your Father?" "Yes," said the missionary. "And," said the chief, "did you say that he is the Indians' Father?" "I did," said the missionary.

"Then," said the old chief, like a man on whom a dawn of joy had burst, "you and I are brothers!"

Everyone on earth are all sons and daughters of God and Jesus is our brother. We are related even to people that we don't care for.

**We are one human family even though our flesh is of all different colors, even though we speak different languages, even though we call God by different names.**

**Let us pray that we too can be like Jesus, that we can be Good Shepherds, loving all whom we encounter, just because they are family, related to us through our brother Jesus Christ. May the Eucharist that we receive today, the Body of Christ, really unite us in love with all of our brothers and sisters. May we too become good shepherds in the image of Jesus Christ.**

## **2. THE EUCHARIST**

Can you imagine the reaction to Jesus of the First Century Jews when he made statements to the effect of “eat my body and drink my blood and I will raise you up on the last day?” Words such as astounding, unbelievable, ridiculous, and crazy might have been uttered within hearing range of Jesus. They were amazed that this man who they thought to be mortal would make a claim that he could raise people up. They likely thought Jesus to be delusional.

To those who were not used to Eucharistic language, eating someone’s body sounds cannibalistic and drinking any blood, especially human blood was seen as an insult to God, to say the least, kosher meat has all of its blood drained from it before consumption.

Literal thinking about the Body and Blood of Christ may be shared today by non-Christians. Even Christians of denominations that are not centered in the Eucharist, that do not believe in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, may be thinking that Catholics literally eat human flesh and drink human blood.

As Catholics, we know that the words “body” and “blood” refer to the real presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. But, do we truly understand the full meaning of the Eucharist? Today’s readings work together to increase our understanding of Eucharist in our own lives.

The first reading from Proverbs can’t help but bring Eucharist to mind with the invitation to bread and wine. The person speaking in many of the Proverbs is Wisdom, the wisdom of God, or in other words, the Holy Spirit.

Wisdom calls the simple, those who lack understanding, to her feast. What does she mean by simple? Is it the unintelligent, the childish or less mature? Does she mean God’s precious anawim --- the poor? Are we not all “the simple” in comparison to God? Do we understand the great Mysteries of our faith? Wisdom is showing us that we are all equal before God and equally welcome at the Table of the Lord.

The Gospel continues a series of Eucharistic teachings by Jesus that have stretched out over the past month. In many pagan religions that included animal sacrifice, when participants in the ritual ate the



sacrificed animals, they believed they were filled with their gods. But they did not necessarily believe that their ritual feast would help to result in their salvation. They did not necessarily believe that they were fueled to take on the behavior of their gods.

The flesh of Jesus, the body of Christ, represents his complete humanity. Jesus is God, born in our midst to live like a human from birth to death, from childhood to adulthood. He is God, struggling with all of the troubles of life that we experience. He is God battling human temptations. He is God, working out human relationships.

Through Jesus, God enters into our everyday lives and his presence in our lives makes us holy. Therefore, if we eat his body in the form of the real presence in the Eucharistic bread, we will gain some of his strength, wisdom and perfection that will move us along the journey to salvation.

Jesus says we must drink his blood. In Jewish thought, blood belonged to God. When a person or an animal loses too much blood, they die. Blood is the life that God gives us. That is why when an animal is slaughtered to be kosher, the jugular is cut and the blood is drained. When Jesus tells us that we must drink his blood, he is telling us that we must take his blood, take his life, into the very core of our being.

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the deacon --- or if there is no deacon --- the priest, pours a few drops of water into the unconsecrated wine saying the words, usually to himself, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity."

The wonder of the Eucharist is not only that Jesus walked among us working miracles and doing wondrous works, but that he is with us 2000 years later because he invites us to let him enter our own beings. There is the old saying, "you are what you eat." St. Augustine puts it another way, you become the Sacrament you receive. These sayings direct us to the full potential of the Eucharist in our lives.

We are called to be Eucharist, to be Eucharist to the creations of God; to other people, to God's creatures and to nature. It is our vocation to care for all of God's creation in our daily lives and to show

the face of God to others by our words and by our actions, always and everywhere.

The second reading from the Letter of Paul to the Christian community at Ephesus gives us some guidelines for being Eucharist. He tells us in no uncertain terms to stay away from evil influences, which in his day were drinking parties that resulted in bad behavior and idolatry. Today we have many more evils to overcome in order to be Eucharist. Excessive drinking, use of addicting recreational drugs, and modern-day idolatry such as dwelling on possessions and other objects of status defined by the world around us.

The theologian, A. C. Welch said something to the effect of, "People have to be filled with something and it should be the Holy Spirit, not addictions or the negative aspects of life."

In the Early Church, people honored each other. St. Paul tells us that this is because they had reverence for Christ and they saw each other not in the light of their professions or social standing. They saw each other in the Light of Christ, and as Eucharist.

Paul also points out that the early Church was a singing church. The psalms and hymns that they sang in community filled them with happiness and the Holy Spirit as they gave thanks to God, and became Eucharist, which means thanksgiving. We too, as we sing at Mass, are giving praise to God and are being filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Mass is not a solitary communion with God, but a great community celebration of unity with each other and unity with God. We are called to be active participants in the Mass. We are active listeners during the prayers and readings and active participants when singing God's praises in our responses to prayers and in song.

Mass is the source and summit of the power of God within. We come to reinvigorate ourselves with the Eucharist that our Church teaches is in the Word of God, in our worshipping community, and in the body and blood of Christ that we receive. Being active in the celebration of the liturgy including receiving the Eucharist, rather than passively sitting in the pews going through the motions, is what gives us the power to be Eucharist to others until we return to Mass again.

**As we stand in the Communion line today, let us reflect on the great gift we are being given. The gift to receive the sacrament we become; the gift that gives us the power to do the work of God and to show God to others, through our words and actions, until we again return to Mass. Let us pray that we are given the inspiration and strength to be Eucharist.**

### **3. ON MOTHERHOOD**

I recently heard a story about a man who was sick and tired of going to work every day while his wife stayed home. He wanted her to see what he went through so he prayed: Dear Lord, I go to work every day and put in 8 hours while my wife just stays home. I want her to know what I go through, so please allow her body to switch with mine for a day. Amen.

God, in His infinite wisdom, granted the man's wish. The next morning, sure enough, the man awoke as a woman. He arose, cooked breakfast for his mate, awakened the kids, set out their school clothes, fed them breakfast, packed their lunches, drove them to school, came home and picked up the dry cleaning, took it to the cleaners and stopped at the bank to make a deposit, went grocery shopping, then drove home to put away the groceries, pay the bills and balance the check book.

He cleaned the cat's litter box and bathed the dog. Then it was already 1:00 p.m. and he hurried to make the beds, do the laundry, vacuum, dust, and sweep and mop the kitchen floor. Ran to the school to pick up the kids and got into an argument with them on the way home. Set out cookies and milk and got the kids organized to do their homework, then set up the ironing board and watched TV while he did the ironing.

At 4:30 p.m. he began peeling potatoes and washing vegetables for salad, breaded the pork chops and snapped fresh beans for supper. After supper he cleaned the kitchen, ran the dishwasher, folded laundry, bathed the kids, and put them to bed.

At 9:00 p.m. he was exhausted and, though his daily chores weren't finished, he went to bed where he was expected to make love which he managed to get through without complaint.

The next morning he awoke and immediately knelt by the bed and said, "Lord, I don't know what I was thinking. I was so wrong to envy my wife's being able to stay home all day. Please, oh please, let us trade back."

The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, replied, "My son, I think you have learned your lesson and I will be happy to change things back to

the way they were. You'll just have to wait nine months, though. You got pregnant last night."

This story serves two purposes for me, it reinforces just how much mothers do and it makes me think that each one of you is more qualified than I to give a homily on motherhood. It is said that all men need a mother, and that when a man gets married his wife takes over the job. My mother and my wife Karen would undoubtedly agree. I don't see myself as qualified to be a mother, but I have an appreciation of the holiness and importance of motherhood.

In this morning's Gospel, a woman is so emotional listening to Jesus that she cries out "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed." Jesus replies, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." Mary did indeed hear God's word and agreed to be the mother of Jesus. My sisters, you are not that different from Mary. You hear God's word every day and love and raise the children that he has entrusted to you.

In the reading from The Prophet, we heard clearly that our children have been entrusted to us by God and that the parenting that we do is clearly holy work that we do in God's name. It is often difficult to see our children, not as extensions of ourselves, but as God's children who we are to nurture into being all that God has given them to be.

As mothers, you are so important to the Church. The prophet tells us that our children are meant to live in the future. In fact, they are the future, the future of the Church, the future of the world. Their future can only be ensured by their learning to love themselves, to love others and to love God. Modeling these three things is the holiest work any one can do. As it is usually the mother that spends most of the time with children in our society, you are the primary models. What more important work can you do for God than that?

Sometimes our children frustrate us. It doesn't seem that we are getting through to them. But, we do. They always look at what we do, which can be more powerful than what we say. Our own holiness is what teaches our children to be holy. I'd like to read something by an anonymous author.

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you hang my first painting on the refrigerator, and I wanted to paint another one.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw you feed a stray cat, and I thought it was good to be kind to animals.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking I saw you make my favorite cake for me, and I knew that little things are special things.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I heard you say a prayer, and I believed that there is a God I could always talk to.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I felt you kiss me good night and I felt loved.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw tears come from your eyes, and I learned that sometimes things hurt, but it's all right to cry.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I saw that you cared, and I wanted to be everything I could be.**

**When you thought I wasn't looking, I looked ... and wanted to say thanks for all the things I saw when you thought I wasn't looking.**

#### **4. ADVENT**

There is a story about a school principal who called the house of one of his teachers to find out why he was not in school. He was greeted with a child's whisper, "Hello?" "Is your Daddy home?" asked the principal. "Yes," whispered the small voice. "May I talk with him?" the man asked. "No," replied the small voice. "Is your Mommy there?" he asked. "Yes," came the answer. "May I talk with her?" Again the small voice whispered, "No." "All right," said the principal, "Is there any one there besides you?" "Yes," whispered the child, "A policeman." "A policeman? Now, may I speak with the policeman?" "No, he's busy," whispered the child. "Busy doing what?" asked the principal. "Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the fireman," came the whispered answer. "The fireman? Has there been a fire in the house or something?" asked the worried principal. "No," whispered the child. "Then what are the police and fireman doing there?" Still whispering, the young voice replied with a soft giggle, "They are looking for me."

It would be pretty hard for the "rescuers" to find the child as long as the child keeps hiding from them. In today's gospel we see John the Baptist in the desert calling out to the people of Judea to come out into the open desert and let God find them. You can liken it to the fireman calling out to the "lost" child. The child has to leave his hiding place to come out into the open and be found by the fireman.

In scripture, the desert is a symbol for the place where people encounter God and God encounters people. It was in the desert that the Israelites learned about God and what God was calling them to do. It was in the desert that they became God's people and they recognized the Lord as their God. Before Jesus began his public ministry, he spent forty days and nights in the desert. It was a time of discovering and deepening his personal relationship with God

By calling the people into the desert John was calling them to let go of their false hopes and securities and learn to hope and trust in God alone. Two thousand years later, John's call continues to echo in our ears. When we go into the desert, we don't catch a flight to Nevada or Utah or other deserts of our country. We leave behind those things in life that tend to distract us from God, from building the

**Kingdom of God. We leave behind desire for status, for wealth, for power, for image and instead we look for the coming of Jesus Christ into our hearts. We shift our hope and trust from things that are temporary to things that are permanent, we shift our hope and trust from the things that are meaningless at the end of time, to the things that will last eternally.**

**Advent is a time of emptying our hearts and minds of desires and attitudes that keep Jesus Christ out, so that when Christmas comes, Christ will once again be reborn within us.**

**Our society has made preparation for Christmas a time of the year when the temptation is great to value the wrong things and to rush around so preoccupied that we barely have the mental energy to acknowledge what the upcoming Christmas season is really about. Our Advent desert gives our lives the simplicity, the clarity and the focus where we can once again make room in our hearts and welcome Christ.**

**As we decorate our homes, is the emphasis on getting our decorations out and placed before we have completely digested our Thanksgiving dinners? Or is it to lovingly place the ornaments and other decorations while thinking about the memories of people and events, the gifts of God in our lives that they evoke.**

**Do we give gifts because we want to receive something equal back or because we want to show how prosperous we are and how much we can afford to give? Or, do we give to our friends and relatives to show them how much we love them? Do we make the effort to give to those who have nothing so that they can see the love of God that is supposed to live in each of God's people?**

**Do we start listening to Christmas music before Advent even starts and stop on the second day of Christmas like the world around us? Do we put our trees on the street to be picked up by the garbage collectors on the first possible collection day after Christmas Day without waiting for the season to be over?**

**These are questions we need to ask ourselves because the answers tell us whether or not we are really prepared for the rebirth of Jesus Christ in our lives. If we rush through Advent without taking**



time out to renew ourselves and our view of the meaning of Christmas, then how can Christmas be meaningful?

John Betjeman, an English Poet who lived during the first three quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century echoed the call of John the Baptist when he wrote about Christmas:

For some it means  
An interchange of hunting scenes,  
On coloured cards. And I remember  
Last year I sent out twenty yards,  
Laid end to end of Christmas cards  
To people that I scarcely know.  
They'd send a card to me and so  
I had to send one back. Oh dear!  
Is this a form of Christmas cheer?  
Some ways indeed are very odd  
by which we hail the birth of God  
We raise the price of things in shops,  
We give plain boxes fancy tops,  
And lines which traders cannot sell  
Thus parcelled go extremely well  
We dole out bribes we call a present  
To those to whom we must be pleasant

My sisters and brothers, I pray that all of us will answer the call of John the Baptist and use our Advent experience to empty our hearts of the distracting and unimportant so that we may welcome Christ in all of his goodness and love so that we will have a holy and blessed celebration of Christmas.

## **5. Parable of the Ten Virgins**

In the mid twentieth century, Dr. J. Alexander Findlay, a Protestant theologian and writer, was driving through the Galilean country side when he came to a small village. He wrote, "I caught sight of ten maidens gaily clad, playing some sort of a musical instrument as they danced along the road in front of our car. When I asked my driver what they were doing, he told me that they were going to keep the bride company until the bride groom arrived. When I asked the driver if I could go see the wedding, he shook his head and said, 'You never know when the wedding will be, it might be today or tonight or tomorrow or in two weeks. No one knows for certain.'" The element of surprise about when the wedding takes place has not changed much since the first century in modern village life.

The Gospel writer has Jesus in a very rich real life situation, one that still exists today, to make several important theological points about our encounter with God when we pass from life into eternal life.

As Catholics, we do not pay as much attention to the end times as do the fundamentalist Christians. The end of the world dominates their weekly services. A series of ten novels in the Left Behind series by Tim La Haye and Jerry Jenkins have been best sellers as a result of a massive marketing campaign by the publisher. These books are based on the Rapture, an evangelical Protestant teaching about when Jesus returns to take the true believers into heaven. The people left behind do battle with the forces of evil and will be judged later on. These novels are driven by fear and give a distorted view of the Book of Revelations. Unfortunately, many Christians see these novels as a Bible study.

Catholics should take time to think about the end times, but our view should not be based on fear, but on love, the love that we give and receive during our earthly lives. Our view should be based on faith, faith in the promises of a God of love, mercy and forgiveness who gives us every opportunity to live our lives in a Christ-like manner.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins urges us to live our lives in preparation for the heavenly kingdom by helping to build the kingdom

on earth as it is in heaven. The first century Jews could understand the parable in terms of their real lives because of Jewish wedding traditions.

Jewish weddings were not just for the family, but were a community affair. The bride traditionally gathered with her closest unmarried friends and waited for the bridegroom to call for her. The bridegroom would come for the bride only after he had negotiated the dowry with the bride's family and his arrival could be anytime night or day. When the bridegroom came, a grand procession would begin that would take the bridal party through the streets of the town so that they could greet as many people as possible. If the procession was at night, it was required by law to carry oil lamps. When the wedding party arrived at the place of the wedding and reception, all of the doors were closed and the festivities began. Latecomers were not admitted.

The first century Jews of Matthew's Christian community, who believed that Christ's return was not far off, could see the parallels between the parable and the end times. Like the bridal party who did not know when the bridegroom would arrive, the early Christian community understood that life was fragile and could be snatched away without notice and that the end times could come suddenly and understood that they had to be ready. Readiness consisted of two things; being in good relationship with God and being in good relationship with community.

Oil was a valuable commodity in the first century and represents strength, healing, nourishment and beauty. In the parable, oil represents our character, our faith and our relationship with God. The dimensions of our lives that oil represents have to be developed over time. They cannot be bought or acquired at the last minute. These aspects of who we are must be a natural part of our day to day lives.

The wedding procession itself represents our walk with community. It has been said that we cannot be saved alone. Salvation comes in community and because of our relationship with community.

Finally, the doors that close when the wedding festivities begin represent our personal end time. If we haven't lived according to the Gospel calling, the doors may be closed to us.

**In anticipation of our personal end time, which will come, we need not only have faith, but to live our faith. Our faith cannot be borrowed or lived by someone else, we each have to live it actively. Faith comes alive both by what we say and what we do. James tells us that faith without action is empty. This is God's way of telling us to "put our money where our mouth is!"**

**In the parable, the wise virgins are self-righteous when the foolish virgins ask them to borrow oil. The wise virgins, so to speak, create two groups; we and they. We are church, we are one, we are there to help each other and pick each other up.**

**Since we do not know when our time will come, we are compelled to live each day like it is the last one. We can't grow tired of doing good or become complacent because of the world around us. God calls us to show love and mercy for others, to share with those in need, to care for the earth, and to work for peace and justice. These are not one-time actions to check things off of a list, this is the way we are to live our every-day lives.**

**There is a story about a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He referred to the dates on her tombstone from the beginning to the end. He noted that first came the date of her birth and then he spoke of the following date with tears. But he said what mattered most of all, though was the dash between those years.**

**For that dash represents all the time that she spent alive on earth... and now only those who loved her, and God, know what that little line is worth. For it matters not, how much we own; the cars....the house...the cash. What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.**

**So, think about this long and hard... are there things you'd like to change? For you never know how much time is left, You could be at "dash mid-range."**

**If we could only just slow down enough to consider what's true and real, and always try to understand the way other people feel. And be less quick to anger, and show appreciation more and love the people in our lives like we've never loved before.**

**If we could treat each other with respect, and more often wear a smile... remembering that this special dash might only last a little while.**

**When your eulogy's being read with your life's actions to rehash...would you be proud of the things they say about how you spent your dash?**

## **6. BAPTISM**

People flocked to the wilderness to hear John's message and be baptized by him. John was baptizing for the forgiveness of sin. The Jewish community was well aware that there had not been a prophet in their midst for over 300 years. Here was a man who resembled a prophet out of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It was obvious to the people that John lived his message. He dressed simply wearing a camelhair garment held together by a belt around his waist. He was said to eat locusts and wild honey, which may have been the insect and the honey of wild bees or perhaps it was the carob nut and tree sap. In either case these were the foods of the poorest of the poor.

John's message was also effective because he preached what was already in the hearts of the people. The Jews had a saying, "If Israel would only keep the law of God perfectly for one day, the Kingdom of God would come." People were waiting for someone to stir their souls towards righteousness and John did that. The community also appreciated his humility. He claimed he was not fit to undo the sandal strap of the man who would follow him. Feet got very dirty, especially in the wilderness. It was the duty of a slave to remove his master's sandals, the job of the lowest of the low. John placed himself lower than the lowest of the low, the servant of a slave. This is the same mentality of Jesus washing his disciple's feet at the Last Supper.

The question that this scripture raises is: "if baptism is for the remission of sin, why did Jesus need to be baptized?" Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his public ministry and our baptism is our call to ministry. We are connected to Jesus through our baptism and therefore all of the baptized are connected.

It is unfortunate that baptism has become a thing to do for many people rather than the impetus for living a Christian lifestyle. In my own family, my daughter and her husband, unfortunately, do not practice the faith. Her husband's family demanded that the grandchildren be baptized, because God forbid, if they weren't baptized and something happened they would go to limbo! The poor theology of limbo, probably the result of theologians with too much

time on their hands, went out with the Second Vatican Council. But, can you imagine a loving and merciful God ever allowing a pure and dependent little baby to be cast adrift in a place like limbo? My son-in-law called me prior to the baptism of my first grandchild and stated, "I don't really believe, but I am superstitious enough to cover all of the bases." How sad it is that a sacrament becomes reduced from an act of faith to an act of superstition.

How often do parents present a child for baptism and never return to church until it is time for the next sacrament? Sacraments are a sign of how we are supposed to be living, not a graduation ritual. How often are godparents chosen because of family relationship or close friendship rather than because of their qualifications to take responsibility for the child's spiritual development should something ever happen to the parents? Do the parents and godparents live their baptismal responsibilities?

The bigger question is how many of us live our baptismal responsibilities? Are we involved in emulating the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, or do we simply come to Mass on Sunday to get the required check mark to get enough "hell-avoidance" points?

There are four things that describe Jesus' baptism and they also apply to our lives. First, it was a time of decision for Jesus. He must have seen a sign in John's ministry that it was time for him to begin his own public ministry. We are challenged to decide to devote an appropriate amount of our time to the service of others.

Second, it was the time of identification for Jesus. Although he did not need to be cleansed from sin, it was a moment for him to identify himself with the poor, the downtrodden, the ill-housed, the underpaid, the abused and all others who could not live lives in dignity. We are challenged to identify with and serve people who are not able to attain a decent standard of life and dignity.

Third, it was a time of approval for Jesus. He knew that he was embarking on God's work and that God approved. We are challenged to discern if the ministry we do is what God is really calling us to or just something that is comfortable for us.

Finally, it was the time of empowerment for Jesus. The Holy Spirit came down upon him in the manner of a dove, a symbol of

peace and love. Jesus ministered in the spirit of peace and love. We too are challenged to be ambassadors of peace and love in the ministry of our daily lives.

Sometimes it is easy to identify what we are called to do to serve the people of God. Sometimes we find that what we think we want to do is not what God is calling us to. Sometimes we are dragged into ministry kicking and screaming.

There is a story by an unknown author called “The Lord Said Go”:

And the Lord said, GO

And I said, Who me?

And he said, Yes, you

And I said:

But I am not ready yet,

And there is company coming

And I can't leave my family.

You know that there is no one to take my place.

And he said, You're stalling.

And the Lord said, GO

I said, But I don't want to

And he said, I didn't ask if you wanted to

And I said:

Listen I'm not that kind of person

To get involved in arguments.

Besides my family won't like it.

And what will the neighbors say?

And the Lord said, Baloney



**And a third time the Lord said, GO  
And I said, Do I have to?  
And he said, Do you love me?  
And I said:  
Look I'm scared  
People are going to hate me  
And cut me into little pieces  
And I can't take it all by myself.  
And he said, Where do you think I'll be?  
And the Lord said, GO  
And I sighed,  
Here I am ... send me.**

**This story is about all of us. By virtue of our baptism, we are called to serve. In the end, we do not chose how we serve, God chooses us to serve as we are needed. God gives us the gifts that we need to serve when we are called. We only need to say yes as Jesus did.**

**At Jesus' baptism, he heard his Father's voice saying to him. "You are my beloved son and I am well pleased with you." When we are living our baptismal call, we know that God is looking down upon us and saying; "You are my beloved son or daughter and I am well pleased with you."**

**As we approach the Lord's Table this morning, let us pray for wisdom in discerning what God calls us to and strength and courage to accept God's call.**

## **7. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS**

Imagine picking up your newspaper and reading this story: A minister's wife in the small town of Blye, Oregon had taken five young children on a picnic. They chose a tree for a shady spot. A balloon was caught up in the tree. One young boy climbed up and brought the balloon down. The bomb that was attached exploded and killed them all including the baby that the minister's wife was carrying.

How would hearing this story about the loss of lives of innocent children and a young wife and expectant mother make you feel? This story is little known, but true. It happened during the Second World War.

The Japanese released as many as 20,000 bombs attached to balloons into air currents and they were carried as far as Michigan. It was a crazy scheme, but it killed people. War is like that. War does not discriminate between military and civilian targets; between soldiers and children; between combatants and innocents.

War escalated from the Japanese attack on military targets at Pearl Harbor to fierce battles in the South Pacific to the grand finale of nuclear explosions in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which claimed the lives of one hundred thousand innocents and injured the same number. This horrendous power, unleashed by man, ended the war with Japan.

The Church recognizes that there are times when war has to be fought to create peace. The "just war" teaching of the church started with St. Augustine in the fourth century and has been developed by theologians and church leaders over the past century and a half. In a nutshell, the church teaches that lasting peace is the only objective of a just war. War is not for vengeance, punishment or to put leaders we like into power. Civilian casualties and non-military property damage should be avoided. And, war should be fought in a mournful frame of mind. Cheerleading and hawkish patriotism have no place.

American troops are currently deployed in a number of countries. Civilian casualties occurred in the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan. We are on the brink of invading Iraq. North Korea is a scary and unpredictable unknown. Is there a better way?

**In the Gospel, Jesus says, “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.” Jesus sees peace in its full Hebrew and scriptural meaning. Shalom doesn’t ever mean only the absence of trouble; it also always means everything that makes for a person’s highest good.**

**Jesus is not saying that peace lovers are blessed. It is easy to love peace. The beatitude is about blessing peace makers. Sometimes we think we have to maintain peace at any price. How often have you heard not to rock the boat? Jesus rocked a lot of boats. He spent his entire ministry standing up to injustice and sin. Peace does not just happen. If we ignore sinful or unjust situations around us, they will escalate into harmful conflict. We are called to actively face sin and injustice, even when we struggle and risk making peace.**

**Since shalom means everything that makes for humanity’s highest good, this beatitude could read: Blessed are those who make this world a better place for all to live in. To do this, Jesus is calling us to make relationships right between people.**

**There are those who spread trouble, bitterness and strife. Unfortunately, these people live in every society and belong to every Church. Trouble makers are doing the devil's work. On the other hand, there are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live, people who bridge gulfs, heal pains, and sweeten bitterness. These people are doing God’s work, It is the great purpose of God to bring peace between humanity and himself, and to bring peace between people. The person who unites people does God's work.**

**Another way to state this beatitude is: blessed are those who encourage right relationships between people, for they are doing God’s work!**

**As we come to the Lord’s Table today, may we be nourished to follow the example of Jesus, the peace maker.**

## **8. TEMPTATION IN THE DESERT**

In today's Gospel Jesus is being tempted in the desert by Satan before he starts his ministry in the Galilee. Probably all of us have been to a desert, learned about deserts in school, or seen specials on The Discovery Channel.

The Judean Wilderness is a particularly harsh desert. It starts on the shores of the salty Dead Sea, which sustains no life, and extends into the Judean Hills. The landscape is barren and stark. There is little vegetation, and it is dry, hot and oppressive during most of the year.

The animal life that inhabits the desert has had to adapt to the harsh conditions. Many of the animals are predators. Only the fittest survive. The same could be said of the people who have inhabited the Judean Wilderness through the ages. This desert is the ideal place to go for solitude and soul searching.

In so many ways, for so many people, the world has taken on the characteristics of the desert. Many people have a hard and barren life, fall victim to human predators, and feel lonely and isolated.

Jesus went into the desert for prayer and introspection. He withstood the temptations of the devil and emerged to do his ministry. We too are called to a desert experience each year during the season of Lent.

We are called to resist the temptation of the values of the world around us. We are also called to discern how we might apply the Lenten actions of prayer, alms giving and fasting to making our world a less hostile and more loving place.

We should look more closely at what we pray for during Lent. It is routine to pray for the people and the needs that are close to home and close to our hearts. Why don't we make an effort this year to read the newspaper or watch the news and learn where suffering and injustices are occurring? We could pick several stories each day that strike us as tragic, really try to put ourselves in the shoes of the victims to feel their pain and pray for them.

Alms giving is not necessarily limited to money. Alms giving includes sharing our time and energy. When we give from a excess of money, time or energy, what we give or do might be useful, but when

we do without in order to give to someone else, we are giving from our substance. Our giving becomes a gift of ourselves in the truest sense of the word.

Finally, there is another way to look at fasting. Yes, the church calls us to fasting and abstinence. But, to give up meat, I can easily eat lobster instead of steak each Friday. I can give up some excess food on fast days without a great deal of sacrifice. But we might also consider looking at fasting and feasting in conjunction with our attitudes and behavior.

An unknown author wrote "Lent: A Season for Fasting, A Season for Feasting." I am going to read this series of statements. I am sure that we can all find some that apply to us.

- **FAST from judging others; FEAST on Christ living within them.**
- **FAST from harsh words; FEAST on words that build others up.**
- **FAST from discontent; FEAST on gratitude.**
- **FAST from anger; FEAST on patience.**
- **FAST from pessimism; FEAST on optimism.**
- **FAST from worry; FEAST on God's care.**
- **FAST from complaining; FEAST on appreciation.**
- **FAST from bitterness; FEAST on forgiveness**
- **FAST from self-concern; FEAST on compassion for others.**
- **FAST from discouragement; FEAST on hope.**
- **FAST from depressing facts; FEAST on uplifting facts.**
- **FAST from suspicion; FEAST on truth.**
- **FAST from weakening thoughts; FEAST on inspiring promises.**
- **FAST from idle gossip; FEAST on purposeful silence.**

If we use Lent well this year, perhaps we can help to change the face of our troubled world. Perhaps we can create spring in the Judean Wildernesses of our planet. Even the Judean Wilderness blooms briefly each year after being nourished the first spring rains. Totally carpeted by tiny wild flowers, for a short time, the desert takes on a soft, colorful, and an inviting appearance.

**My brothers and sisters, Jesus began his ministry after he left the desert. If we can use the desert time of Lent to bring the water of our baptisms out into the world, perhaps it too will bloom with the beauty of love, hope and peace.**