

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C, 8.18.19

Jeremiah 38: 4-6,8-10; Hebrews 12:1-4;

Luke 12:49-53

SPEAK UP... SPEAK OUT...

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

I can't express deeply enough what last Sunday's wonderful celebration meant to me. I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of love that was shared by everyone who attended, as well as notes and cards from those who couldn't be there. The parish staff, especially Wendy, Kristine, Pat, Oscar and Christoph, and the team of parishioners who helped them and attended to every wonderful little detail, poured themselves into making it a memorable event for everyone.



Colorful balloon decorations, a jazz quartet of fine musicians from Acalanes High School, a beautiful duet sung by Mary Jo and Traci Chiappone, a game room for the kids, line dancing with a professional instructor for those brave enough to get up and move their feet, a multiple choice guessing game about facts from my life—most of which I'd rather forget. The smorgasbord of delicious food and drink and the great summer barbeque provided by the Knights of Columbus fed over three hundred party-goers. All this was arranged without my knowledge, but the biggest surprise was my younger sister Pat and her

husband Tom showing up a couple days before the party so they could celebrate with us. I had no idea they planned to travel from Ohio to California, a place they had never been before.

It was heartwarming and provided a deep sense of satisfaction to see our new Community Center – inside and outside -- being used to its full capacity – a testimony to all of you and your commitment and generous support in bringing this massive building project to completion. I'll be forever grateful. A 70th birthday celebration isn't a personal accomplishment – God gives us each year and each breath we take. More important to me was marking the 50th anniversary of my profession as an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales and the 40th anniversary of my priestly ordination. They are the two aspects of those years which have given them significance. I'm grateful that so many of those years of ministry could be shared here with all of you.

In light of all the mutual expression of joy and unity that last Sunday's celebration demonstrated, it's more than a little jarring this Sunday to hear the words of Jesus in today's gospel that seem to contradict his role as "Prince of Peace":



Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three.

Here, Jesus is reminding his disciples that to follow him necessarily entails the demanding role of standing up for the values of the gospel. Jesus' words are addressed to them and to all Christians who have paid dearly for living their faith and holding firmly to the gospel ideals. As disciples we commit ourselves to values and principles that are not cherished by everyone. We can be misunderstood for our beliefs, even ridiculed. In fact, our lives may actually be a reproach to those who don't share our aspirations. There may be times when we have to stand in opposition to others. All of this tends to alienate us, even place us at odds with those we love.

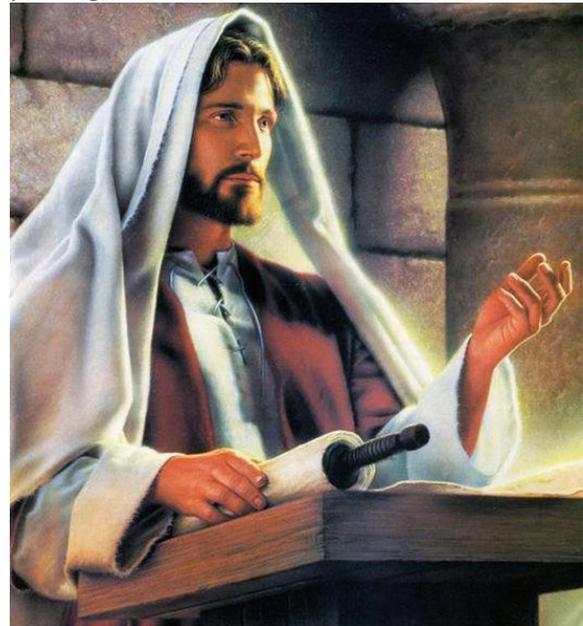
For two decades now we've been sharing the sacrament of Baptism here during the Sunday liturgy. One reason for that practice is to remind the parents and families of the little ones that their child is part of a larger family than their own – the family of the Church. That child will share a Christian identity that takes him or her beyond the narrow bonds of blood relatives and inserts them into discipleship with all of us.



The other reason we occasionally celebrate that sacrament at weekend liturgies is to remind ourselves of our original baptismal commitment. We need to hear the words that define us, the words that are spoken as the newly-baptized is anointed with the

sacred chrism: *As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and ruler, so may you always live as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.* Priest... Prophet... Ruler.

How are we to understand those roles and put them into practice? To be a Priest in the spirit of Jesus is to offer worship to God by the way we live our lives each day and by modeling love for all people. To be a Prophet in the spirit of Jesus is to be a speaker of truth and justice with boldness and conviction. To be a Ruler in the spirit of Jesus is to be a humble, servant leader, a foot-washer as Jesus was, placing the needs of others before our own.



Today's scriptures highlight for us that second role – the role of Prophet, perhaps the most challenging of those three roles. In our daily living there should be a part of each of us that looks into the signs of our time – to understand the events on earth and seek to address them with the message of heaven. That's what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer at each Mass: *thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* Our baptismal role is to do whatever we can in our individual lives to

make that happen—to make God’s kingdom visible to others.

It's also the role of each Christian community to live out that role of the Prophet in a corporate way. We’ve done that over the years in many ways – our tithing program that supports Contra Costa Interfaith Housing locally and the Maya Indian Missions globally. The longtime support through our Outreach Ministries of the many organizations and charitable works that are improving the lives of the needy. The individual ways that so many of you live out the gospel. In recent months a number of our parishioners have been exploring more ways to expand that baptismal role of being prophets, especially by looking at the root causes for some of the social ills we are facing – poverty and homelessness, gun violence, treatment of immigrants, health care. In forming a Social Justice Committee they are shining a light on the social teachings of the gospel and exploring ways that we as a parish community can promote those gospel values more intentionally. They have recently formulated a mission statement which you can find in today’s bulletin. It states: *“Believing in the God given dignity of all human beings, we provide non-violent advocacy for basic rights and needs for the vulnerable, consistent with the actions of Jesus and Catholic Social Teaching. We strive to promote public policy transforming lives so that all are physically, socially and emotionally secure. Through education, advocacy and encouraged involvement, we hope to integrate a quest for social justice into the life of the parish.”*

I commend the Committee for their effort and extend an invitation to any who wish to join them. The next specific initiative which is open to everyone begins on Monday evening, September 16. The

program is entitled “JustFaith.” It’s a small-group gathering that utilizes engaging reading, thought-provoking dialogue and relationship-building around many of today’s social issues and challenges.



Our commitment to Christ is no guarantee that this earthly life will be easy; Jesus assures us that the cross means division, conflict and tension. The experience of ancient and contemporary prophets, who surround us like a cloud of witnesses, bears that out. God’s Word in Jesus, however, does promise us that God will be with us in the struggle, that we have an ultimate victory in Christ, and that we can have inner peace in spite of the external troubles we face. We take our lead from Jesus himself as the Letter to the Hebrews says: *For the sake of the joy which lay before him Jesus endured the cross, heedless of its shame..... Hence, do not grow despondent or abandon the struggle.* May the role of the Prophet find a place in your life and mine as we strive to live out our Baptismal vocation each day.

John Kasper, OSFS