

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Prayer for Our Nation ~

God our Father,
giver of life,
we entrust the United States of America
to your loving care.

You are the rock
on which this nation was founded.
You alone
are the true source of our cherished rights
to life,
liberty,
and the pursuit of happiness.

Reclaim this land
for your glory
and dwell among your people.

Send your Spirit
to touch the hearts
of our nation's leaders.
Open their minds
to the great worth of human life
and the responsibilities
that accompany human freedom.

Remind your people
that true happiness
is rooted in seeking and doing your will.

Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate,
patroness of our land,
grant us the courage
to reject the "culture of death."
Lead us into a new era of life.
We ask this through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].

Our Lady Chapel



Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.

CHAPEL OUTDOOR PICNIC — NEXT SUNDAY:

Our Chapel Outdoor Picnic is Sunday, July 14^h. Every year, the Chapel picnic has been a great event for the entire family. The picnic will be held rain or shine from **11:15 AM – 1:30 PM at the Lower School Patio & Dining Hall.** Family Mass takes place at **10:00 AM** and the picnic begins right after Mass — what a wonderful way to continue our celebration of community. Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, Pulled Chicken, Baked Beans, Cole Slaw, Potato Salad, Cookies, and beverages are provided. So here it comes once again. It will be a great event for the entire family. **Pot Luck (non-perishable) sides & desserts are welcome!** Come and enjoy family and friends. **Swifty and a face-painter friend will join us, as will the Euclid Beach Rocket Car.** In order to properly prepare for our picnic, we ask that you please **RSVP by July 7th to Patty [440-473-3560]** in the Chapel office, or simply **sign up on the Picnic Sign-Up Sheet on the easel located in the narthex of**

**THE FEST IS COMING — AUGUST 4TH:**

Join us on **Sunday, August 4th for the FEST.** This year's diocesan family FESTival takes place on the grounds of the **Center for Pastoral Leadership, 28700 Euclid Ave, Wickliffe, OH 44092.** It's the perfect family day and an amazing one-take trip. Come and hear the best Christian artists [*Casting Crowns, We the Kingdom, Cochren & Co., and Caleb and John*] for FREE. There are activities, events, and fun for the entire family. The day also includes opportunities for prayer, Confession, and more. **Bishop Malesic and Bishop Woost** will bring the FEST day to a close with a beautiful outdoor Mass at 8 PM. This will be followed by an incredible American Fireworks display. This highlight of the summer — the perfect day of faith, family and fun — is all for FREE thanks to our sponsors [**Marc's, Sherwood Foods, Baron's Bus Lines, and the Diocese of Cleveland**]. Check out all the details by going to: www.theFEST.us. Mark your calendars and spread the word for the best day of the summer — the FEST.

**FAITH EDUCATION REGISTRATION BEGINS:**

It's time to begin registration for our Faith Education Program for Next School Year. **All children who will be part of our Faith Education program need to register [even if you were a part of the program last year].** Our Sessions go from **8:45—9:45 AM, on Sunday mornings,** with the hope that our children would then **participate in our 10:00 AM Family Mass. Register your family for next year's classes by contacting Patty in the Chapel Office [440-473-3560].** If you have any questions, please call Patty in the Chapel office. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.

**RECOVERY AND HELP:**

Only people who have suffered in some way can save one another — exactly as the Twelve-Step Program also discovered. Deep communion and dear compassion is formed much more by shared pain than by shared pleasure. Look at what Jesus says to Peter: “Peter, you must be ground like wheat, and once you have recovered, then you can turn and help the brothers and sisters” [Luke 22:31-32]. Was this Peter's real ordination to ministry? It is this call to recovery and help that really matters and that transforms the world. Properly ordained priests might help bread and wine to know what they truly are, but truly ordained “priests” are the “recovered” ones who can then “help” people to know who they are too. Maybe we have been more preoccupied with changing bread than with changing people. In general, you can lead people on the spiritual journey as far as you yourself have gone — you can't talk about it or model the path beyond that. That's why the best thing you can keep doing for people is to stay on the journey yourself. Transformed people transform people. And when you can be healed yourself — and not just talk about healing — you are, as Henri Nouwen so well said: a “wounded healer.”

—Father Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is seriously ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian ['09], Rosa ['12] and Edwin ['17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For Debbie Langer, friend of Cindy Frimel, who was diagnosed with brain cancer.
- For Denise Marzano, who is battling liver cancer.
- For Nada Kucmanic, who is seriously ill from cancer.
- For Josephine Fernando, who is seriously ill.
- For Sean O'Toole, Gilmour Athletic Director, father of Owen ['18], Connor ['20], Kelsey ['24], and former Gilmour student, Erin, who is recovering from surgery.
- For Mary Vislosky, who is seriously ill as a result of bone cancer.
- For Brother Robert Livernois, C.S.C., who is recovering from heart surgery.
- For Brother Joseph LeBon, C.S.C., who is under the care of hospice.
- For Cathy Force, mother of Erika DiCello Lacroix ['90], Grandmother of Andre ['23] and AJ ['25] Lacroix, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Lawrence Wynn, Gilmour Strength and Conditioning Coach, who is recovering from surgery.
- For Brother Thomas Cunningham, C.S.C., who is seriously ill with various health issues.
- For Eileen Urbanek, Associate at Miklus florist for Our Lady Chapel, who is in rehab following a stroke.
- For Agnes Mirando, grandmother of David ['12], Agnes ['14], and Matthew ['25] Mirando, who is terminally ill.
- For Bob Willey, brother-in-law of Father John, who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Sue Pickerill, mother of Gingy Lennon, who is seriously ill.
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**SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — JULY 20th:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on the **third Saturday of each month.** They welcome volunteers. **On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.**

Our Savior Lutheran's Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. Please join us for a great experience.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For an end to political polarization.
- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Jack Boduszek, father of Graham [‘10] and Jocelyn [’13] Boduszek
- For Barbara Vaughn, long-time Glen Oak and Gilmour teacher
- For Bob O’Hara, brother of Father Tom O’Hara, C.S.C.
- For Mary Beebe, mother of Brother Jonathan Beebe, C.S.C.

ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration Form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

WEEKLY OFFERING:

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

Total Offerings: Saturday [6/29/24] ----- \$ 1,486.00
Total Offerings: Sunday [6/30/24] ----- \$ 1,190.00

EVERYTHING IS GOOD:

I just returned from a walk through the dark woods. It was cool and windy, but everything spoke of you. Everything — the clouds, the trees, the wet grass, the valley with its distant lights, the sound of the wind. They all spoke of your resurrection; they all made me aware that everything is indeed good. In you all is created good, and by you all creation is renewed and brought to an even greater glory than it possessed at its beginning. O Lord, I know now that it is in silence, in a quiet moment, in a forgotten corner that you will meet me, call me by name and speak to me a word of peace. It is in my stillest hour that you become

the risen Lord to me.

—Henri Nouwen

NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, JULY 10th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, July 10th at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word.



Our topic: Let us go to the House of the Lord [Psalm 122]

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. **We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting.** Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, July 7: 14th Week in Ordinary Time	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream
Monday, July 8:	NO MASS
Tuesday, July 9:	NO MASS
Wednesday, July 10:	NO MASS
Thursday, July 11: St. Benedict	NO MASS
Friday, July 12:	NO MASS
Saturday, July 13: 15th Week in Ordinary Time	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, July 14: 15th Week in Ordinary Time	10:00 AM In-Person & Live Stream

ST. ADALBERT SCHOOL SUPPLIES:

Once again this year, we are assisting the students at St. Adalbert School with their school supplies. We have received a list of supplies which the children need. Here are their most requested items: **#2 Pencils, Pink Erasers, Crayons, Colored Markers, Glue, Single-Subject Spiral Notebooks & Loose-leaf Paper.** Here is how you can be a part of this outreach. Simply shop for items on the list. Kindly **return the items** whenever you come to Our Lady Chapel; we will have boxes in the narthex marked “St. Adalbert.” **If you do not have time to shop, simply place an envelope in the collection box and mark it “St. Adalbert’s” or drop it off in the Chapel office.** Together, we will work and plant our seeds of hope and goodness with their community. Thank you in advance for your generosity and helping the children of St. Adalbert! Contact Patty in the Chapel Office [440-473-3560] if you have any questions. We will be concluding our school supply drive by **Monday, August 5th.**



LIVE LIFE:

—“The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”

—Thomas Edison

REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S THEME:

Being finite, we're a mixed bag; some weeds always steal into the garden. Canadian songwriter and poet, Leonard Cohen in his song *Anthem*, said: "there is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in." But cracked pots are defective. It is strange to praise weakness. Yet, St. Paul reminds us: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" [2 Corinthians 12:7-10].

Intimacy is truly intimacy when fruitfulness of some kind is intended and desired. An intimate conversation is more than the exchange of good ideas followed by a separation — as if two billiard balls bumped into each other. Physical rape as well as psychological, and military rape — no matter the degree of proximity — intends violence and destruction. Marital intimacies are experienced for what they are, and for the future. There may be a pregnancy; but if not, there are other forms of fruitfulness which extend the intimacy into the future. Prayer itself is an intimate time — whether there are words, feelings, or insights. The real fruit of prayer is not merely the time spent in prayer, but the prayerful time spent after. The "afterness" of intimacy is the fruitful result also desired and intended.

The prophet Ezekiel — as with most of the prophets — is pictured as being burdened, warned, and also comforted — all at the same time. This all began when Ezekiel received a vision as an exile in Babylon. Above him was the gleaming throne of the Almighty. Glory knocked Ezekiel to the ground, but not for long. As the vision faded, God's spirit set Ezekiel back on his feet to receive his call [Ezekiel 1:28, 2:1-5].

The Israelites had rebelled; in exile they abandoned their God. Now, God is sending the prophet — even though he will, most likely, not be heard. All the prophet is told to say is that he is speaking on behalf of the Lord God. God then says: "Well, at least they know that a prophet has been among them." Ezekiel's calling is sealed when he sees a vision of a book being lowered to him, and he is asked to "eat the whole thing". On the cover of the book are written three words of coming attractions, announcing suffering and grief. Ezekiel is beginning to get the whole picture — he needs to swallow the Word of God, before he can deliver it.



Early into his public life, Jesus is tested. He faced stormy seas, resentful scribes, unclean spirits, and those physically wounded. His spirit was strong as he preached, and he healed many throughout the land. Then he came home. Only within the presence of his neighbors and family did God's power depart.

The hometown folk thought they knew Jesus; because of this, they did not allow Jesus to be the person that he really was [Mark 6:1-6]. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, but the town's folk need to see His diplomas — what gives him the right to get up there like that? — "Who does he think he is!"

Those who were listening to Jesus think that they know Him because they know from where He comes — that is from right there among them. But while Jesus is from there, he really is from way beyond. They are amazed and "They took offense at Him". They were relying on their knowledge, and He was inviting them to go beyond what they know, and to move into a relationship of faith.

Their lack of belief is the cause of His not being able to do the signs and mighty deeds they were seeking. The "honor" for which He was asking them was not based on locale or family ties, but on accepting Him as The One Who is Sent. Jesus leaves the temple. But to add to their confusion, Jesus does heal a few by touching them. In the end, Jesus departs amazed at their lack of faith — as they are amazed at His unpredictable behavior.

So here we have these two — Ezekiel and Jesus — showing up, and just being who they are. Prophets steer us to higher ground. People have become complacent with being on the lower ground where they exist. Without a jab or two, complacency holds us back. Paul sucks in the joy of God's momentous

IT'S NICE TO KNOW THAT WE'RE IN GOOD COMPANY:

Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth contains two of the most significant statements in all of Christian literature — "power is made perfect in weakness," and "when I am weak, then I am strong" [2 Corinthians 12:7-10].

Though Paul normally comes across as possessing a strong personality, in this part of his second letter to the community in Corinth, he zeroes in on his weakness. Though we can't be certain what his "thorn in the flesh" actually is, most commentators today believe it's malaria — a condition which comes and goes, but always leaves someone in a weakened condition, unable to accomplish what he or she intends to accomplish. If so, this must have been the biggest drawback to Paul's itinerant preaching ministry.

Yet instead of moping and complaining about his Achilles heel, Paul sees it as part of the risen Jesus' plan for him. Paul believes that the Lord has graced him so sufficiently that he, with the Lord's help, can even overcome an obstacle which would stop most others from carrying out their God-given work — "I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me." In other words, the Apostle is convinced that if he had no obstacles to his work, he might actually be tempted to believe that it was he, and not the Christ, who was accomplishing those amazing things.



Such confidence in God working through us, in spite of our failures, is also a frequent theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. The disciples of Ezekiel who saved and put his oracles into the form we have them today included this insight in the prophet's initial call narrative. God warns Ezekiel that he will face people who are "Hard of face and obstinate of heart — for they are a rebellious house — they shall know that a prophet has been among them" [Ezekiel 2:2-5]. God is only interested in keeping his promise to send prophets to his people. Whether they fail or succeed is irrelevant. Failure is not only an option for prophets — it's a normal part of their ministry. In fact this seems to be why Mark includes Jesus' return to Nazareth narrative in his gospel. It can only be seen as Jesus' failure in prophetically preaching to the residents of his own hometown [Mark 6:1-6].

This passage so zeroes in on the historical Jesus' limitations that Matthew, in copying it about ten years later changed it in two significant ways — because carpenters weren't highly thought of in Palestine during the first third of the first century CE, Matthew altered the people's comment: "Is he not the carpenter . . . ?" to "Is this not the carpenter's son?" [Matthew 13:55]. He also changed Mark's comment: "He was not able to perform any mighty deed there . . ." to "He did not work many mighty deeds there [Matthew 13:58]. There's quite a huge difference between could not and did not. Fortunately for us, Mark wasn't afraid to say there were some things not even Jesus could do — some things which depended on peoples' faith in him.

It is safe to presume that if there weren't some in the Mark's community who were failing in the various areas in which the risen Jesus was calling them to minister, we'd know nothing of Jesus' disastrous return to Nazareth. Just like Paul 25 years later, Mark was convinced that something had to be said about weakness and failure. It was an essential part of the Christian experience. To put it bluntly, if we always succeed in everything we think the risen Jesus expects us to do, we might not actually be doing what he expects us to do.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

STEPPING INTO SOMEONE'S WORLD:

The moment you step into somebody else's universe, you're putting yourself in that place of uncertainty — in which you have to be open to the possibility of learning something different or feeling something different. I think that is where hope is.

—Cristina Pato

to recognize it, to revel in it and to do all we can to invite others into it. That's a much bigger responsibility, and a much more pleasant activity, than denunciation.

Now, in the middle of summer 2024, it's easy to focus on signs of disaster all around us. Mark's Gospel suggests when we do so, God is amazed and saddened at our lack of faith. When we refuse to believe in the overwhelming strength of goodness and love, we stand in firm solidarity with the people among whom Jesus could accomplish very little.

We aren't called to save the world — God has taken care of that. Our call is to be part of the 10% who believe in God and in God's faith in us. If we have the courage to believe, we can be the ones to stand up and announce good news in such a way that others begin to believe. The potential of 10% has proven itself for the past 2,000 years.

—taken from the writings of Sister Mary McGlone, C.S.J., which appear on the internet

LIFE TEEN and EDGE:

Our Life Teen and EDGE youth group is meeting in-person again. We will meet for an hour beginning at 11:30 AM following our 10 AM Sunday Mass in the Chapel. If you are unable to join us, there are many resources available for you on the Life Teen website — lifeteen.com. There are numerous blogs and videos for you to connect with. The Life Teen national office continues to release many new programs. Please contact Father John for more information. And please join us each Sunday for our Mass at 10 AM — in person or live-streamed, and then come to our Life Teen/EDGE gathering after Mass. And above all, let us continue to join each other in prayer. Father John is available for you. Please contact him.



READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday:	Hosea 2:16-22, Matthew 9:18-26
Tuesday:	Hosea 8:4-13, Matthew 9:32-38
Wednesday:	Hosea 10:1-12, Matthew 10:1-7
Thursday:	Hosea 11:1-9, Matthew 10:7-15
Friday:	Hosea 14:2-10, Matthew 10:16-23
Saturday:	Isaiah 6:1-8, Matthew 10:24-33

15th Week in Ordinary Time: Amos 7:12-15, Ephesians 1:3-14, Mark 6:7-13

NOVENA TO BLESSED BASILE MOREAU:

Blessed Basile Moreau was the founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which Fr. John and the Brothers at Gilmour belong. We have two booklets with Novenas to Blessed Basile Moreau. One is used for a personal intention or healing; the other is used when praying for the intention or healing of someone other than yourself. The Novenas were composed by Father Thomas Looney, C.S.C. Many have received blessings and healings through the intercession of Blessed Basile Moreau, and now we want to extend this invitation to you and your family. Please see Father John and he will be glad to give you the booklets.



revelations. But this exuberance is punctured by thorns. Paul begs God for relief — “Take away this curse.” God refuses. One hand opens to the reality of God's love for me; the other stretches out for more. We exist in this tension: dwelling in the hands of God, we yearn for all weakness to be gone. But thorns turn us back to the God for whom we are already enough. Some thorns are embedded in the self. They are not alien forces. They are me. God does not seek the pristine me but the mottled me. Often enough confrontation is a revelation of the confronter as well, and this is the occasion for self-confrontation. Ouch!

Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jesus all showed up because they had all received well their persons and their missions. They did not care about what others were saying about them because they knew what they, themselves, were saying about themselves. There have been many prophetic persons in each of our lives, telling us, pushing us, slowing us down, and building us up.

Often, it takes time to hear, receive, and to take to heart what we hear. The important question is: “do I accept myself what I have to off?” Others may accept me for the prophet that I am, but do I accept myself? This is how Christian Spirituality works; not easy, but God does work through such as we.

—taken from the writings of Jeanne Schuler and Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

AN UNEXPECTED SENSE OF FREEDOM:

Contemplation is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do — it is the key to prayer, liturgy, art and ethics, the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom — freedom from self-oriented, acquisitive habits and the distorted understanding that comes from these.

Routines and rituals can also meld together. The morning cup of coffee becomes a sacred process of movement and pauses, senses and stillness. The evening walk shifts into a meditative trance of watching the ducks in the nearby pond. Routines become rituals the second we sense an internal bow to the moment's entanglement with holiness, with mindfulness, with love, wonder and awe. In ritual, we become rooted and invited to dive deeper into the expanse of myself and my own unfolding. The mindful shift of acknowledgment takes us into more spaciousness, questions, and curiosities. Without routines and rituals — and routines shifting into rituals from time to time — we would not be as alive and awake to our own personhood.

Ritual also frequently offers some inexplicable sense of freedom. While traveling to Trappist monasteries, I often felt a strange sensation of freedom. Hearing the bells calling the community to prayer seven times a day felt like a homecoming. The hours of work combined with prayer gave me a sense of rhythm that soothed me. The irony of rituals feeling like a loving freedom will not be lost on the one who experiences them. When ritual comes as an invitation, a choice to engage or not engage, limits are expanded because freedom is present. And from this place, where ritual meets freedom, our relationship to self, others, and the Divine can be continually deepened.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, found the importance of a rhythm or “rule” of life in Benedictine spirituality: “The idea that all of time can be sanctified — that is, that the time we may instinctively consider to be unproductive, waiting or routine activity, is indispensable to our growth into Christian and human maturity. How we spend the time we think is insignificant is important. It is not only the well-known Benedictine union of ‘laborare and orare’ [work and pray], but the wider commitment to a life under ‘rule,’ a life that takes it for granted that every aspect of the day is part of a single offering.”

Christ's human life is open to the divine at every moment; it is not that God the Word deigns to take up residence in those parts of our lives that we consider important or successful or exceptional. Every aspect of Jesus' humanity and every moment of his life is imbued with the divine identity, so that if our lives are to be images of his, they must seek the same kind of unbroken transparency.

—Father Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

NO HOMETOWN HERO HERE:

Shortly after He began His public ministry, Jesus went back to His hometown of Nazareth. What happened there was very sad. All of the familiar things and people were there — but it was far from being a happy homecoming [Mark 6:1-6]. They gave Him the cold shoulder and He ended up leaving Nazareth forever. As St. Luke gives the account, the people there in Nazareth froze Him out and then tried to throw Him over a cliff [see Luke 4]. Why?

The whole episode seems terribly strange to you and me. How could an entire town treat Him that way? They were not incredibly mean spirited. St. Mark didn't give us this account in order to vilify the people of Nazareth. His reason for reporting this event was probably to show us that they were not so very different from you and me.

Here we find the town folk standing face to face with God's very Truth made flesh and blood for us. Here was God offering himself in His only-begotten Son to people just like us. They were amazed at His knowledge and His skillful teaching. But having heard what He had to say, the people of His own home town simply walked away and dismissed what He had to offer them because they disagreed with His message. He was telling them that God's favor rested on people they despised — an idea they couldn't stomach.

Isn't that true with many of us, and with so very many people we know? They and we have heard what Jesus has to say. We've listened to His parables and even admired them. Many join us for Christmas and Easter Masses and then disappear from our midst. We stand before God's truth, we stand before God's expression of himself in our own human terms, and we fail to comprehend His message. Are we that much different from the people of Nazareth — there in Jesus' own home town?

Why does this happen?

Well, sometimes we deliberately avoid hearing and accepting the truth. Obviously what Jesus had to say back there in Nazareth made them uncomfortable. He threatened their comfort zones. They didn't want to deal with what He was saying. Others, throughout the ages, have not only ignored the Teacher, but went on to question and analyze Him. If they could induce doubt and raise troubling questions about Jesus they could thereby excuse themselves from being responsible for what He had to say.

Other people, when their assumptions are challenged, attempt to change the subject. Remember when Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman who had five husbands and was then simply living with a man? As soon as Jesus raised the topic she began talking about where the location of true worship was to be found — “Should we worship God here on His mountain, or in Jerusalem?” she asked [see John 4]. And as for the lawyer, when Jesus told him to love God and to love our neighbor as we love our selves, the lawyer responded by attempting to debate the question — “And just who is my neighbor?” he asked [see Luke 10]. Both the Samaritan woman and the lawyer resorted to avoidance techniques.

Evasion and avoidance have not been limited to the people of Jesus' own hometown. When we have to come to terms with Christ's teachings about loving people who are unlovable, turning the other cheek, trusting in God, and forgiving others who have sinned against us, we then we question the teacher — “Sure, that was easy for Jesus, wasn't it? He never had a family to support. He never had to deal with a nagging wife and surly teenagers. He didn't have to provide for a family in a dog-eat-dog business world.” Notice that these tactics do not flatly deny the validity of what Jesus was teaching — they simply evade, avoid and degrade them.

**THE POTENTIAL OF 10%:**

How would you have felt in Ezekiel's sandals? First, God sent him a vision of frightful, four-faced creatures who appear out of a terrifying storm. When that knocked him off his feet, the Spirit of the Lord exhorted him to stand up like a man and preach to the Israelites in exile. The Spirit made no secret about Ezekiel's chances for success — God described his intended audience as rebels, hard of face and obstinate of heart. The only thing that seemed important to God was that Ezekiel would warn the people, no matter the outcome [Ezekiel 1:28, 2:1-5].

Today, Mark demonstrates how Jesus' career mirrored Ezekiel's. Preaching at home put Jesus in front of his most critical audience [Mark 6:1-6]. His people had seen him grow up and expected nothing more of him than they did of themselves.

Why did they take offense at him? According to Mark, it was their lack of faith. They didn't/couldn't/wouldn't believe. What did they find beyond belief? John's Gospel quotes Nathanael as hitting the nail on the head by asking: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” [John 1:46]. The townspeople's lack of faith wasn't just about Jesus, perhaps not even mostly about Jesus. The real question was: “Can anything good happen among us?”

Ezekiel's Israelites were stubborn; Jesus' people seemed more jaded than hardhearted. They knew they were lightweights on the national scale — Nazareth was truly a “one-camel town.” They worried about what might happen to them because of the crazy local guy performing God knows what sort of signs and proclaiming that God's reign was alive among them. Was he looking for trouble? Was he blind to the real world?

Believing in the “real world” may be the greatest stumbling block there is when it comes to faith. It's fairly easy to say: “I believe in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting” — largely because we don't really know what it means, and the belief requires nothing of us. But before we proclaim that God is now reigning among us, we want some evidence — and our perception of the “real world” may leave us blind to the evidence we seek.

Mark reported that Jesus accomplished very little in Nazareth. That must have hurt even more than when only one of the 10 cured of leprosy thanked him. Ezekiel might have appreciated a 10% success rate, but who among us would give our lives to a venture that promised so little?

Yet, that's what God has done from the moment of creation. God set a universe — and more — in motion, endowing us with the freedom to develop as we would. According to Jesus, God's hope has always been that we would choose to enhance our natural union with one another and with God. God created us with the potential to do so, but not everyone — more or less 10%? — believes in or wants to take up God's offer.

Ezekiel had two messages. First, he told the unfaithful people that they were responsible for their own unhappy fate. The second was that God was ready to rebuild with them. It often seems easier to deal with the first than the second; penance demands less than accepting Jesus' invitation to collaborate with God's reigning among us.

Doing penance and denouncing evil allow us to wallow in despondency and to feel righteous by calling out the wickedness around us. Jesus' invitation is far more challenging. Jesus insists that God is reigning in the universe. He promises that we can get caught up in God's reigning if only we are open to do so.

Jesus calls us to metanoia — a new, wildly open mindset — that focuses more on possibility than on mistakes. When we are captivated by that, we become impelled to action on behalf of God's reigning —



house.

This rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth is only the first of many other rejections that Jesus is to face. Ultimately, of course, he will face the greatest rejection of them all when the authorities will put him on trial and sentence him to death on the Cross. This final rejection will, however, be overturned and Christ will victoriously rise from the dead and bring with him into heaven all of those who embrace his Gospel of peace. We know the story of Jesus and we know that rejection is turned into vindication, loss into gain, disaster into triumph.

Each of us is presented with the same choice that those people of Nazareth faced — either to accept or reject Jesus. Once we hear his message we have to choose whether to believe it or not. Often enough people decide to reject the Gospel. However, like the citizens of Nazareth the people of today often dress up their rejection — they give one insubstantial reason or another for their refusal to believe. Those Nazarenes said: we have known him for years, we used to change his dippers; therefore he is essentially one of us which means we cannot accept him as a great teacher or miracle worker.

In the modern world we might say that science has now solved all the important the questions of life and we do not need to listen to a preacher whose message is already 2,000 years old. Or we might only hear some of his words and turn-away bored, and ignore the substance of his message. Or we might choose to misunderstand his words and reject them because we do not know what he is talking about. There are lots of reactions that we could take towards Jesus, but they all end up being either acceptance or rejection.

The Good News is that we gather together each week as a parish Church because we have heard the Word of God and believe it. We have decided to listen to Jesus' words of life. We have chosen to reject our sins and to embrace the Gospel of love. While today in Mark's Gospel we hear about his own people who refused to listen to him, we also know that there were many others, like ourselves, who actually did accept Jesus and his message.

We think of the shepherds present at his birth, the wise men from the east, the Apostles, as well as sinners like Zacchaeus, Mary Magdalene, the Woman of Samaria, the Good Thief, to name a few. We also think of some people who were in positions of power like the Centurion, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. But most of all we think of the poor and the lowly, the downtrodden and the oppressed, the weak and the simple; these people accepted Jesus eagerly and knew that he had come with a real message of hope and reassurance.

We all have a choice. We all need to do our best to live out in our lives the values Christ presents to us. We earnestly seek salvation and we know that it is only to be found in Jesus — the one true Savior of the World. To him be glory for ever and ever.

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister, S.D.S., which appear on the internet

EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS:

We are currently discerning a new group of Eucharistic Ministers who would undergo training within the next month. If you feel that the Lord is calling you to this ministry, we would be delighted to include you in that ministry here at Our Lady Chapel. Both adults and teens [must be a Senior in High School] are welcome to participate in this very special ministry. We are in need of ministers for both our Saturday evening and Sunday morning Masses. **Contact Father John or the chapel office [440-473-3560] if you feel called to this ministry.** We are always in need of Eucharistic Ministers.

WISE WORDS:

14 If you don't love it, you'll never be great at it. Do what you love. Love what you do.



Another thing that plagued the people of Nazareth — and that plagues us along with them — is a “know it all” attitude. They knew Joseph. They knew Mary. They knew about His childhood and youth. They assumed they knew everything there was worth knowing about him. They had Him pegged. How sad they were so blindly self-deluded. How sad it is that many of us are no different from them.

Knowing the facts is not the same as knowing the truth. To be sure, facts are true. But truth is more than factual knowledge. If I know your gender, your racial and ethnic background, if I know your medical history, your social security number, date of birth, and your credit history, I haven't even begun to know who you are. What worries you? Are you concerned about the friends your son or daughter has? What makes you happy? To what is your life devoted? Do you believe in anyone or anything? These sort of things go beyond simple facts. They are not the sort of things that concern “know-it-alls”.

In our schools, we are taught to learn using the Scientific Method. Empirical knowledge — knowledge gained by that which is able to be objectively proven — is held up as the only valid sort of knowledge. But what about the sort of truth that we can learn about people — and about ourselves? Using the Scientific Method cannot bring us that sort of truth. But that is what Jesus is talking about and teaching us. That sort of truth cannot be gained in a laboratory, or demonstrated in a court of law. That sort of truth can be only be tested in the laboratory of life, and put on trial in the way we live with others — and with God.

The only way we'll ever know the validity of what Jesus taught is to live what He taught. If we fail to do that, if we avoid doing that or otherwise dismiss it, then we'll miss the truth about who we are and what kind of a God that God is. We'll be no different from the people of Nazareth, the know-it-alls who wouldn't listen, the people who lived in a town to which He never returned. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could work no miracles there. And so Jesus left them there in their own smugness.

God offers; we respond. What will be our response?

—taken from the writings of Father Charles Irvin, which appears on the internet

LISTEN TO JESUS:

“Tell souls not to place within their own hearts obstacles to My mercy, which so greatly wants to act within them. My mercy works in all those hearts which open their doors to it. Both the sinner and the righteous person have need of My mercy. Conversion, as well as perseverance, is a grace of My mercy. Let souls who are striving for perfection particularly adore My mercy, because the abundance of graces which I grant them flows from My mercy. I desire that these souls distinguish themselves by boundless trust in My mercy. I myself will attend to the sanctification of such souls. I will provide them with everything they will need to attain sanctity. The graces of My mercy are drawn by means of one vessel only, and that is-trust. The more a soul trusts, the more it will receive. Souls that trust boundlessly are a great comfort to Me, because I pour all the treasures of My graces into them. I rejoice that they ask for much, because it is My desire to give much, very much. On the other hand, I am sad when souls ask for little, when they narrow their hearts.”

—Jesus to St. Faustina, 1577



A LIGHT-HEARTED BUT SERIOUS APPROACH TO THE GOSPEL:

The bishop asked the monsignor: “How was my homily?” The monsignor replied: “You were brief.” The bishop responded: “I try never to be tiresome.” The monsignor quipped: “You were tiresome too.” The nineteenth century English poet, Alfred Tennyson, wrote: “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” Was that a cute throwaway line or did Lord Tennyson know something we do not? The answer to our question is to be found in the prayer life of Jesus.

During boyhood, Mary and Joseph annually took the Child to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover in

the Great Temple. It was a costly journey for this working class family. And don't forget exhaustion — the trip was about a five day walk over ninety miles. The sun would blister them in the day, and the nights were freezing cold. But each year, faithful as the sunrise, they loaded the old donkey and moved south. When Jesus became a Man, He continued to go to Jerusalem for the solemn feast. Furthermore, every Saturday in Nazareth, the Master picked up His weekly contribution envelope and took Himself to His synagogue or parish. Like most Jews, He was tithing 10% of His income. Anything less He would consider a tip.

There He worshipped publicly and received instructions. This procedure He followed until He knocked the dust of Nazareth off His sandals for good at about age 30. But the Gospel record shows that He continued weekly public worship after leaving His home town. Today Mark explicitly mentions that Jesus was present in a synagogue [Mark 6:1-6]. The next time you want to skip weekend Mass, you might want to dwell on this point. Perhaps a line from Saint Padre Pio might help: "If we understood the Eucharist, we would risk our life to get to Mass. With the above as evidence, one must conclude the Teacher has little patience with many self-deceived men and women. These are the folks who say that, while they do not go to Sunday Liturgy, they do worship God at home in their own way. If such worship was not kosher for the Christ, how can it be acceptable for any of us today?"

Some wannabe intellectuals say: "If the homilies were better, I would go." The only answer for that is the response of the grizzled old pastor: "If it's laughs you want, catch a TV comic. If worship, I'm your man." Can you imagine the number of dull sermons that Jesus of Nazareth must have been subjected to over thirty-three years? How many times must Jesus have put His knuckle deep into His mouth to stifle laughter at some theological gaffe from a well-meaning rabbi? Yet, He faithfully went each Saturday.

"I don't go to church because there are so many hypocrites there." Do you really think there were no such deadbeats around the Teacher during His public worship days? Incidentally, we always have room for one more hypocrite. And, as Andrew Greeley puts it: "If you can find a perfect church, join it. But realize that as soon as you do, it ceases to be perfect."

Deadly homilies and hypocrites notwithstanding, the Nazarene felt obliged to go to public worship. To paraphrase CS Lewis, he wanted to tune into the secret wireless of God. If Christ did all this, so of course should you and I. An even careless reading of the Gospels reveal that the Teacher invested His time in private prayer as well. It was a given that every Jewish family would have a schedule of daily private prayer. This would be particularly true at meals. This custom Jesus continued to the end — as the Last Supper indicates.

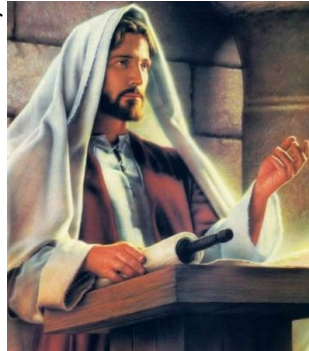
His public ministry had to be very busy. Yet, He put aside quality time for private prayer. Check it out in Luke. He writes: "Crowds pressed on Him. But He retired to a mountain and prayed" [Luke 5:16]. In Mark: "In the morning, He got up, left the house, and went off to a lonely place, and prayed there" [Mark 1:35]. If the Master had not spent so much time in public and private prayer, He could have cured so many more hundreds, if not thousands, of their physical ailments. One must thereby conclude He considered prayer not a luxury item, but a necessity. It is a must-do for us. John tells us the servant is not greater than the master and the pupil not greater than the teacher [John 13:16]. Given the example of the Nazarene, why then do we assign prayer to the fringes of our lives? Why is it not one of the essentials of our brief existence? "To pray is to expose the shore of the mind to the incoming tide of God."

—taken from the writings of Father James Gilhooly, which appear on the internet.

HOW TRUE:

The greatest enemy of learning is knowing.

—John Maxwell



good enough to talk about the Lord, but we are good enough. He makes us good enough. Furthermore, the positive effects of what we say come from the Lord, not from us.

So we come before the Lord today — and every day — and say with St. Peter, St. Paul and so many of the saints: "I am sinful, I can't do your work". And Jesus says: "Yes you can. My power will work through you in ways greater than you can ever realize. And you will know that it is me working, not you. My power is made perfect in your weakness."

—taken from the writings of Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino which appear on the internet

JESUS RETURNS HOME:

After his Baptism in the Jordan and fasting in the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee to preach the Good News of the Gospel to the people of his own locality. He based himself in Capernaum — a bigger town about twenty or so miles away from Nazareth. It did not take too long for stories of his preaching and miracles to reach his home town. After touring some of the surrounding villages, Jesus eventually ends up in his own native place where he stands up to speak in the synagogue [Mark 6:1-6]. This was something quite normal for an adult male to do — especially on his return home after having had some experience of the wider world. We can imagine that there was some expectation as to what Jesus would say in the synagogue after his absence of several months during which time the local inhabitants had heard numerous stories about him.

Alone among the Synoptic Gospels, it is St Luke who says that in the synagogue Jesus quotes the prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [Jesus then rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" [Luke 4:18-21] —and shortly afterwards they drive him out of the town.

Here Mark says nothing about the content of Jesus' teaching — he only gives the reaction of the people to it. As in Luke, at first they are astonished at the sublime words coming from his lips, but then on reflection they choose to reject him.

These people had seen Jesus grow up in their midst and they obviously found it difficult to accept that this person they thought they knew had changed so much. Maybe there was also an element of envy leading them to think that Jesus had somehow got above himself. The people say that they know his mother and his brothers and sisters and give this as the reason for rejecting him. This is surely a case of those who knew him best actually understanding him the least.

It is curious that the townspeople are at first attracted by his message, but then reject him on the grounds that they know him. While this seems to be a very flimsy reason, we all know how fickle people can be — they don't need much encouragement to take a stand against something. They are probably comfortable with their state in life — living shallow lives; they don't want to be lifted up and challenged to live a more noble life.

What is interesting is that Mark does say that Jesus heals a few people in Nazareth but very soon he leaves the town saying that "a prophet is despised only in his own country." It is also interesting that the townsfolk mention that they know Jesus' mother — but not his father. This surely means that St Joseph must have died by this time.

The references that Mark makes to the brothers and sisters of Jesus are generally interpreted by Catholic scholars as referring to his cousins — brothers and sisters are interpreted in the widest sense throughout scripture. However, Protestant scholars, who do not accept the virginity of Mary, tend to take these references to brothers and sisters rather literally. We know that in the ancient world families were very extended; it was common enough for cousins to live next door to each other — or even in the same

POWER MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS:

Paul writes to the Church at Corinth as a troubled man, and because of this, his words are troubling for us also. St. Paul writes about a “thorn in the flesh” that has caused him deep suffering. Three times he begged the Lord to remove this from Him, but all he heard was the Lord saying: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” [2 Corinthians 12:7-10].

What was it that was upsetting St. Paul so much? People have speculated over the years, but we have no way of knowing. Whatever it was, it was significant for Paul. It could not have been something as minor as a speech impediment as some have speculated. Nor could it have been his caustic temper. It was something far more personal — and even more severe. It probably kept him awake at night. It is troubling for us to think about the great St. Paul have a major personal problem.

Even in our cynical age, we still want to turn our saints into perfect little plastic statues. But people are not perfect, and even the greatest of the saints were people like you and me — continually fighting our own tendencies to sin. The voice of the Lord told Paul that His Power — the Lord’s Power — is made perfect in weakness. It was clear to Paul that the wonders of the Lord that took place through his ministry only occurred because God was working through him.

At a later time, Paul would write: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” [Philippians 4:13]. It is easy for people to get so bogged down with their own conception of what the minister of the Lord should be like that they miss the Word of God. It is also easy for all of us to get so bogged down with the recognition of our own sinfulness that we refuse to allow the Lord to use us for others.

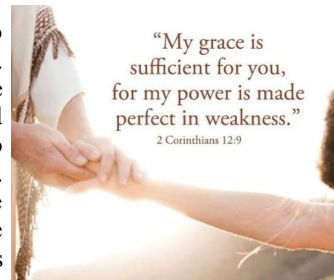
The call of Ezekiel is a good example of this. Ezekiel is told that the people would not want to hear the Word of God which the Lord told him to proclaim [Ezekiel 2:2-5]. But that did not lessen the fact that it was still the Word of God. Perhaps Ezekiel was strange to them. Certainly he seemed to be unconventional. He shocked people with many of his prophetic actions. People laughed at him; they derided him. But his words came true.

Instead of looking at the man speaking, they should have listened to the man speaking. The same thing happened to Jesus in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus was in Nazareth — the place where he grew up. The people were his neighbors. They knew him since he was small. They were so bogged down in their knowledge of Jesus and his humanity that they refused to listen to the Word of God that He was proclaiming — and that He was. Their lack of faith resulted in Jesus not being able to perform any of the mighty deeds of God among them [Mark 6:1-6]. We often make the same mistake. Some people seem too ordinary to us to be vehicles of God’s truth.

They may be our parents or our children, our neighbors or our companions at work or school. They proclaim a reality that could change our lives, but we don’t want to hear it. Who does he think he is? Who does she think she is? We get so bogged down in the humanity of the proclaimer that we refuse to listen to the proclamation.

Perhaps what is even worse is when we are so overwhelmed with our own sinfulness that we refrain from proclaiming the Lord. Some adults’ views of themselves is such a negative way that they refuse to lead their children properly — “Who am I to tell my child not to do this or that, when I know that I often do things far worse.” And the Word of God is not proclaimed.

And children think that they have implicit approval from their parents to do things their parents do not discuss. Paul was told that Christ’s power is made perfect in his weakness. Paul realized that it was God working through him that brought so many people to the faith. Christ’s power also works through us. We really don’t have the right to deny our responsibility to the Lord. We may think that we are not

**STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS:**

Paul’s letter for this 14th Week in Ordinary Time ends with a paradox — a seeming contradiction [2 Corinthians 12:7-10]. He writes: “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” What does that mean? It seems to make about as much sense as saying: “Whenever I am sad, then I am happy”, or “Whenever I am short, then I am tall.” Yet our inability to understand Paul is part of his purpose. Because Paul, much like Jesus before him, would often use a contradiction to seize our attention, and to force us to think more deeply about something that is important.

What Paul wants us to think about is something that all of us have in our lives: a combination of both strengths and weaknesses. Paul is convinced that in knowing Christ, we will approach both our gifts and our shortcomings in a dramatic new way.

Let’s start with the obvious: none of us is good at everything. Each one of us has certain gifts, certain relationships in which we excel, and other ones in which we struggle. We are proud of what is strong in our lives — and rightly so — for there are few things in life as satisfying as knowing that we have a strength that we can use effectively. We rightly take pride in saying: “I’m a good listener,” or “I know how to communicate with people,” or “I have the ability of motivating people or making them laugh.” We take pride when we can claim that we have relationships that lift us up, or when we know that we can bake well or make something beautiful with our hands. Each one of these things is a strength in our life, and it is something that we willingly place before others.

Our weaknesses are different. Our weaknesses tend to embarrass us. It’s difficult for us to say: “I am often impatient,” or “I frequently overeat,” or “I am poor at protecting myself against the demands of others,” or “It’s difficult for me to admit I’m wrong.” It is not easy to admit that “despite my best efforts I can never get along with that person.” These are our weaknesses, and each one of us knows what our weaknesses are. We know the things that trip us up, and it is difficult to look at them. We want to hide them.

But that is what is so shocking about Paul’s words in his letter to the Church at Corinth. Paul says that he wants to boast in his weaknesses. Now why does Paul want to boast in his weakness? Because Paul knows that his weakness can lead him to Christ. Our strengths tend to lead us to ourselves. Our weaknesses lead us to Christ. For when we have to face something that we are poor at, something that we know is difficult or impossible for us to do, it is in that moment that we know that we must turn and ask help of another. When despite our best efforts we do not improve in certain areas, and certain things keep tripping us up, those very weaknesses become the opportunity where we can turn to the Lord and say: “Lord, you need to help me here, because I’m very poor at this, and it never goes well.” Once we make that request, we must trust and believe that Christ will answer.

Now none of this is magic. When we ask for help it does not mean that suddenly all of our weaknesses will evaporate, or the people we find difficult will suddenly become our best friends. People who are difficult in our life tend to remain difficult, and the weaknesses in our life tend to live on. But when we approach our weaknesses in faith, instead of depressing us and paralyzing us, they can provide an opportunity where we let go of the things we cannot handle and hand them over to Christ.

Paul was like us. He looked at his weakness — the “thorn in his flesh” — and he prayed: “Jesus, take this away.” Christ’s response was, “No. I’m not going to take it away. But my grace is sufficient for you. Even though your weaknesses will remain, they will not destroy you because they will provide an opportunity for my power to become manifest.” That is why Paul could boast in his weakness. His weakness provided the opportunity for him to trust in a higher power. If we allow our weaknesses to do the same, then we will be able to say and understand what Paul said and understood: “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

—taken from the writings of Father George Smiga which appear on the internet



AN ANCHORED LIFE — HOW TO LISTEN TO GOD’S WILL:

When I was 5, I was sure that I would be a princess. As royalty I would marry a rich prince, travel the world, wave to people, and eat all the candy I wanted. I would have a closet full of ball gowns and stacks on stacks of shoes. When I was 15, I was determined to be a world famous wedding cake maker. I loved to bake and I was sure that I would get a job decorating the wedding cakes of celebrities. Now, as I prepare to graduate from college, I am neither a princess nor a wedding cake maker. As I grew up, I realized that I could not continue to plan my life around things that could change. I decided that it made more sense to anchor my life in the one thing that would never change — the one thing that would continually satisfy me — seeking the will of God the Father and living my life asking for His help and direction. As it says in 1 John 2:17: “the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever.”

How do we even begin to seek God’s will? It seems like the answer to this question must be complicated, or there is a procedure that must be followed; there must be some directions that ensure a prompt, uniform response.

But this is not the case, nor will it ever be. If the Lord were able to be quantified and qualified — if He were able to be predicted with certainty — He would not be God. Can you imagine asking Jesus: “Locate the nearest outpouring of grace and blessing in my future”? Jesus is simply not about the nearest quick-fix, or caffeine for your spiritual life.

Our Trinitarian God is a great and awesome mystery. Mysteries are fantastic because they do not grow boring. It is a beautiful and wonderful thing that God the Father does stuff his own way, and we cannot know all of those ways. That means He is God!

And God the Father wants you to know His will for your life. He wants you to be able to follow it. God will tell you who he wants you to be, where He wants you to go, and what He wants you to do. But all this demands listening.

I don’t know about you, but I struggle in prayer to hear the voice of the Lord. When I have a particularly difficult time hearing Jesus speak, these are the steps I follow to dispose my heart and mind to hear Him:

1. **We must desire to hear Him.** We need to examine ourselves and our lives and decide if we really want to hear what the Lord has to say?
2. **We must make that desire known.** Pray. Ask. Pray again. Tell the Lord you want to know Him and are ready to listen.
3. **We must make ourselves available to hear Him respond.** We cannot hear the Lord’s voice, or His answer to our prayer, if our lives are overrun with the noise of the world. We need to carve out time each and every day to sit in quiet and just listen.
4. **Learn what Jesus’ voice sounds like.** The Lord is speaking to you all the time. That is a guarantee. We do not always hear what He is saying because we are not listening, nor we have taken the time to get to know

Did you know parents can pick out the cry of their infant in a room of babies? Their ears become attuned to the specific cry of their child. Did you know that babies can also identify the voice of their mother and father? Their specific voice has the power to calm the child. Your relationship with God the Father works the same way. He already knows and can hear your cry. Learn to hear His voice.

Once we know God the Father is calling us to something, we must act. We must pray, but then we



must get up and go and trust that He is blessing our decision. We cannot constantly worry about “what if I heard incorrectly” or “I’m just not sure.” Trust that the Holy Spirit will guide your actions, even as you carry out His will. Remember what Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand” [John 10:27-28].

This is God’s promise to you — hear His voice, follow Him, and you will have eternal life. God protects you as a loving Father does. Pray. Listen. Then go, trusting you are doing the Lord’s will. We can go out boldly and act with confidence because we have anchored ourselves in the One who is unchanging and everlasting — Jesus Christ.

As for me, I’m still waiting for Jesus to give me stacks on stacks of shoes!

—written by Maddy Bernero, an associate of the Bible Geek

GIVE THANKS:

Happy Fourth of July! Our theme for this weekend is —surprise! — gratitude for country. As we celebrate Independence Day this weekend, we thank God for our nation. This does tie in with our Gospel where we hear about Jesus’ return to Nazareth — his native place [Mark 6:1-6]. It’s natural to feel fondness for a person’s native land.

Still, it doesn’t always happen. When I was a young man — back in the sixties — I considered myself more a “global citizen”. I saw our country’s many failures and did not want to be identified with them. I looked down on patriotism. Today I consider that attitude a mistake.

Pope St. John Paul said this: “If we ask where patriotism appears in the Decalogue, the reply comes without hesitation: it is covered by the Fourth Commandment, which obliges us to honor our father and mother.” We love our parents, not because they are perfect or because they never do anything wrong. No, we honor them because Jesus has commanded it. And he promises that if we honor our parents, we will have a long life and a prosperous life [see Sirach 3].

Something similar applies to love of country. We love our country, not because she is perfect, but because only by loving her will we make her better.

We have reasons to love our country. I think about my grandfather. At the end of the nineteenth century, he left a country with an ancient class system that kept people down. He came to a nation that gives people opportunities. Grandpa Perich and his two brothers started a small logging operation in Skagit County. They earned enough to help relatives back in the old country. Eventually he brought one of them here. My grandma Perich was in her mid-thirties when he sent for her. In spite of their age, they had two children — my Aunt Katherine and Mary, my mom. I am grateful for the opportunities America gave to my grandparents - and continues to give to so many.

I know that some of our ancestors did not have the same good fortune as my grandparents. Still, we are all here together. If we are going to make our nation better, we have to begin with love and gratitude.

I don’t want to give the idea that we are grateful only when things go well. St. Paul talks about God giving him a “thorn in the flesh” [2 Corinthians 12:7-10]. What exactly that thorn was we don’t know. Some scholars speculate that he may have suffered a form of what today we call “depression.”

For today, remember that we love our country like we love our parents — not because our nation is perfect but only by love and gratitude will we make her better. We take to heart these lines from our Independence Day preface: “He [Jesus] spoke to us a message of peace and taught us to live as brothers and sisters. His message lives on in our midst as our task for today and a promise for tomorrow.”

—taken from the writings of Father Phil Bloom., which appear on the internet.

